

THE FIFTH DIAMOND

The Story of Irene Weisberg Zisblatt



Irene Weisberg Zisblatt with Gail Ann Webb

*Authors & Artists Publishers
of New York*

THE FIFTH DIAMOND

The Story of Irene Weisberg Zisblatt

Irene Weisberg Zisblatt with Gail Ann Webb

THE FIFTH DIAMOND

Authors & Artists Publishers of New York
3 Kimberly Drive, Suite B
Dryden, New York 13053 USA
www.AuthorsandArtistsPublishersofNewYork.com
www.AAPNY.com

Copyright © 2008 Irene Zisblatt

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part, without the written permission of the publisher. Requests for such permission should be addressed to Authors & Artists Publishers of New York Inc., 3 Kimberly Drive, Suite B, Dryden, New York 13053 USA

Cover Design Gary Hoffman
Book Design Gary Hoffman

Printed in the United States of America

9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Zisblatt/Irene
History/ Auschwitz/ WWII/ Autobiography

ISBN 978-0-9787113-3-7

www.IreneZisblatt.com
www.TheFifthDiamond.com

DEDICATION

*In Memory of My Best Friend
And Supporter of My Survival
Sabka*

*To My Children
Mark Lawrence Weisberg and
Robin June Mermelstein*

*To My Grandchildren
Haley, Skyler, Shelby, Jacob, and Andie*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiii
IRENE'S FAMILY	xvii
PREFACE	xix
COMMENTS BY GAIL WEBB	xv
APRIL 1942	1
1943 - 1944.	11
SPRING 1944	21
MOTHER'S DIAMONDS.	33
GLOOM.	41
ASSESSMENTS.	51
GLIMMER	59
MARVEL.	69
LIFE?...DEATH?...LIFE?...DEATH?	79
LIBERATION.	87
HOPE	97
AMERICA	107
BAGELS AND LOX.	113
FAMILY	123
HEARTACHE	129
FACING MY PAST.	137
THE LAST DAYS	151
FUTURE GENERATIONS	155
ADDENDUM	163

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first of all like to thank Susan Rachlin for encouraging me to go on the March of the Living in 1994. I would also like to thank Rochell Baltuch for helping me relive my past so that I can contribute to future generations. Rochell has been my leader on each March of the Living and she encouraged me to break my silence. Since that first March of the Living, I have been with Rochell on five marches. Jennifer Resnick interviewed me for Steven Spielberg and the Survivors of the Shoah's Visual History Foundation. This interview eventually led to the production of the Academy Award winning documentary *The Last Days*. To her I will forever be grateful.

I am deeply indebted to Steven Spielberg and the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation for choosing me to be one of the five survivors chronicled in the documentary *The Last Days*. I also want to mention James Moll and June Beallor, and the rest of the crew.

I want to thank my children, Mark and Robin, for their love and support.

Irene Zisblatt
2008

COMMENTS BY GAIL WEBB

In July, 2003, I met Irene Weisberg. I was in Washington, DC, as part of a group studying the Holocaust. The objective of the training program was to educate the group in the hope of eradicating prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Irene was one of the survivors who spent time with the participants and spoke to us.

By the end of the week, I knew I had found a life-long friend. A Jewish Holocaust survivor and a Southern Baptist teacher had two strong similarities: a love of children and a strong faith in God. Irene came to visit me in August, 2004, and we decided to write her autobiography. The mountains of my Appalachian town reminded Irene of her tiny town in Hungary, and, as we walked the farm road next to my home, she told me stories of her childhood. As I listened to her, it was hard for me to envision anything as horrific as the Holocaust happening in my safe little community.

Irene's story is unique. In the midst of all her suffering, she maintained a concentration camp friendship, and remained hopeful. Perhaps her childlike faith sustained her emaciated body during her months of captivity. Although her story is dark, her message is a beam of sunshine. She harbors no hatred toward anyone. Her narrative focuses on a bright future while teaching about a painful past. Since 1994, Irene has been making presentations to students of all ages about her experiences in the death camps and

the Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the atrocity. She is a member of the Holocaust Speaker's Bureau and also speaks to civic and religious organizations.

God left the world the fifth diamond, Irene, to tell us a story...a story of hope...of love...of courage...of survival.

Gail Webb

IRENE'S FAMILY

Maternal Grandparents

Mendel Mermelstein – perished fighting in WWI
Chaya Mermelstein – perished in Auschwitz

Paternal Grandparents

Isaac Seigelstein – died in January 1944 before deportation
Leah Kanigsberg Seigelstein – died in March 1944

Parents

Rachel Mermelstein Seigelstein – perished in Auschwitz
Moshe Seigelstein – perished in Auschwitz

Siblings

Mendel Seigelstein – twelve – perished in Auschwitz
Mayer Seigelstein – nine – perished in Auschwitz
David Seigelstein – seven – perished in Auschwitz
Hinda Seigelstein – four – perished in Auschwitz
Leizer Seigelstein – two – perished in Auschwitz

Maternal Aunts and Uncles

Perle Mermelstein Sternbach – perished in Auschwitz
Shandel Mermelstein – perished in Auschwitz
Aidle Mermelstein – perished in Auschwitz
Charna Mermelstein – perished in Auschwitz
Bencie Mermelstein – perished in Auschwitz

Paternal Aunts and Uncles

Nathan Seigelstein – (wife Helen) – died in 1950s in US

David Seigelstein – (wife Rose) – died in 1980s in US

Martin Seigelstein – cantor in synagogue – died in 1940s in U.S.

Rose Seigelstein Steinberg – died in 1970s in U.S.

Fanny Seigelstein Horowitz – died in 1960s in U.S.

Friedman Seigelstein – died in Israel after Holocaust

Nuta Seigelstein – died during the Holocaust in a forced labor camp in Hungary

Husband

Herman Weisberg – died 1969

Husband's Family

Jacob Weisberg (born in Russia) – died in U.S.

Dora Glegman Weisberg – died in U.S.

Siblings – Izzie, Nelson, Rose, and Anne

Children

Mark Lawrence Weisberg – resides in New Jersey

Robin June Weisberg Mermelstein – resides in Florida

Grandchildren

Haley

Shelby

Andie

Skyler

Jacob

PREFACE

I was only six years old when the Third Reich started the invasion across Europe. My only concern at the time was my school work, my family, and, of course, my friends. The war was far away. I couldn't begin to imagine the extent of evil and barbarity that were to follow. We were all very happy. I enjoyed my childhood in my beautiful resort town surrounded by mountains and rivers. Sheltered by my parents, I pushed aside my fears about what was going to fall upon us and humanity itself.

Since that time in history, the crimes against humanity have not stopped. They continue in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and elsewhere. Because of the enormity, I must write about hatred in the 20th century in Nazi Germany. People must remember the systemic annihilation of human beings. We endured terrible terrors while the rest of the world stood silent. I must tell what happened yesterday because we must never forget the yesterdays if we want a brighter tomorrow. My experience of my childhood may seem inhuman to you, but it happened only a generation ago.

My duty is to keep memory alive. My goal is to teach future generations so that they can learn from the most tragic chapter in the history of mankind. The future generations must be the witness to the witness.

Irene Zisblatt

May 2008

THE HOLOCAUST

APRIL 1942

Isaiah 54:10 "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord who has compassion on you.

Half a century ago my name was Chana Seigelstein. Today, I am Irene - a seventy-five year old "adult." After years of living, I realize that Chana, the child, has always been with me. For decades I suppressed her joy and innocence, but Chana will no longer be silent. Her story must be told so that there will be no more Chanas - no more prejudice - no more intolerance.

I remember that it was spring in Poleno. I breathed the smell of honeysuckle in the air as I walked home from school for the last time. I was excited because my mother was going to have a baby any day, and it was almost time for Passover. Nothing was going to dampen my good spirits, not even the order that Jewish children could no longer attend the public school.

I loved school and although it had been two years, I vividly recalled the day the drummer had marched down my street with the decree. In his uniform and cap he had, in one motion, tucked his drumstick into his shoulder strap, and pulled

out a document. His mouth opened wide like a trumpet when he announced the orders of humiliation and fear, "Jewish children can no longer attend school!"

Crying bitterly to my mother, I had asked, "Mother, what have I done? I love my teacher; I will miss my friends. How will I learn my lessons?" 20

"We will learn together," my mother, Rachel, had replied. "You can help with Mendel, David, and Mayer. Since you have finished your lessons through the third grade, you will be able to teach them." 49

"But who will teach me?" I had questioned.

"I will help you. You can write poems and I will get you books." 68

Mother had gathered books when she could for me, but that spring there were no books. My small town was nestled between the Carpathian Mountains in Hungary, and daily I climbed the hills. I would sit by the river or the little railroad tracks. My friend Olga would sometimes join me and we would share poems and stories. We composed rhymes for birthdays and for family members at the spa where my father worked.

Every day as I walked back home, I passed the school, glancing wistfully into what was once my classroom. Sometimes I thought I could hear Marya and Olena laughing. As hard as I tried, I couldn't understand why they weren't still my friends. As far back in my life as I could remember, my family had enjoyed a wonderful relationship with our non-Jewish friends and neighbors. We had always gone to school together, to the park together, and shared holidays in our homes. Although we didn't have a telephone or television, we had each other. My friends, my siblings and I loved living in the beautiful mountains.

Not far from our small Hungarian village, Hitler was ending democracy and was lining up his henchmen in Germany. I knew the SA were called brown shirts and the SS were the security police. I also realized that the Gestapo was the special state police. Other than not being able to go to school, life wasn't very different for me. I hadn't seen any SS in my country yet, but I knew that their evil was being carried out by the Nyilosh (Hungarian Nazi anti-Semitic gang) sympathizers. During the years 1939 until 1942, the Hungarian Jews had been stripped of their rights and entitlements as if they'd never existed, but I was a child and I felt safe surrounded by the mountains; I didn't think that Hitler and his henchmen would ever affect my life. My country was an ally of Germany and chose not to deport the Jews, but ordered strict restrictions. In addition, men had been forced into labor units, where they were poorly clothed, ill-fed, and ultimately murdered, but I was a little girl. No one would have reason to hurt a little girl.

When I would hear the terrible rumors, I would push those thoughts aside. I loved my home, a duplex I shared with my parents and grandparents. It was a comfortable home, one side matching the other. My Grandfather Isaac and Uncle Friedman lived on one side of the house, but after my Grandmother Leah died, it seemed the house was more open. My mother, father, grandfather and uncle ate their meals together with me and my siblings, and we shared responsibility for the chores. Food was scarcer than before the war, but the farm on the Hungarian hillside provided enough for the family. I especially loved the little, tiny tomatoes that my family grew in the garden. Sometimes I would slip out and hide among the plants and eat them. More often than not, my grandfather would discover me sitting in the dirt with the red, juicy pulp running from my lips. He would laugh with me.

My father worked at a large resort near our home where he was part owner of the spa. My grandfather and brothers planted what seed they could in the fields. I helped my mother with the chores and with the other children. Being the eldest, I felt a special responsibility.

One particularly warm spring day, my mother, Rachel, was uncomfortable from the familiar feeling of pressure she was beginning to experience in her back. I smiled happily at her, thinking about the new baby that was about to arrive.

"Chana, could you and Hinda please feed the chickens?" my mother asked. ~~80~~ 90

"Mother, just let me do it by myself. Hinda is too slow. She takes forever and then the chickens end up fighting over the food," I objected. 105

"Chana, I need to sit for a few minutes to cool myself and to rest. Please do as I ask." 125

I took my two-year-old sister by the hand and we gathered corn into the aprons of our dresses. As usual, Hinda fed the chickens one piece of corn at a time. It seemed as if the chore would never be done. I couldn't help but laugh as my sister carefully chose each morsel, seemingly unaware of the chickens squabbling and flying over her head.

When we finally finished, we ran back into the house to find our mother.

Mother looked ill and she said, "Chana, I need you to run to the spa and get your father. I think it's time for the baby." 144

I took Hinda by the hand and we hurried to the spa to tell my father. Father quickly left work and as he passed by the field on the way home, he instructed my brothers Mayer, Mendel, and David to go home with me and Hinda and to go to Grandfather Isaac's side of the house and to stay there. All of us were so excited. Little Hinda didn't really know what

was happening, but she was happy to be a part of the adventure. Grandfather Isaac and I prepared a simple meal of bread and milk. I listened through the walls as the midwife arrived and before the dusk turned into darkness I heard the cry of a newborn baby. Silently I thanked God as I heard my mother and father laughing and talking quietly. "A new baby....in the midst of a war," I thought, "....a new baby." 156

Eight days later, my siblings and I saw our new baby brother for the first time. It was the day of his circumcision and the rabbi sterilized the instruments and performed the sacred ritual. Leizer wailed in pain. My mother swaddled him in his blankets and placed him in my arms for the first time. As I looked into my baby brother's blue eyes, I realized that they were identical to my mother's eyes. A feeling of protectiveness swept into my heart and I vowed to be a good sister to him.

"I may be only eleven," I whispered to him, "but I will take care of you." 168

Working with my mother with Leizer helped take my mind off of not being in school. It was difficult for me not to be able to go - just because I was Jewish. I often wondered if it was a crime to be Jewish. One day my mother saw me gazing out of the window and she walked over to me and hugged me and said, "School will be open for you soon." 175

My mother always tried to have a perfect solution for anything that was bothering me. She knew how much I had loved my books and my studies. I knew that my mother did not want to see her children cheated.

My parents listened to the news on the radio, but they never shared it with any of us. Mother was very good at keeping things to herself, but often her expressions gave her away. One day I saw her taking the radio out of the house; she had a concerned look on her face. She didn't bring the radio back. I

later learned that Hitler had ordered all Jews to surrender their radios. From then on, our family listened only to the town drummer for news. The drummer brought orders for the Jews, but he only brought orders of hate. One of the first decrees he issued was that all Jews must wear a yellow star on the left side of his or her chest. That star had to be canary yellow fabric of six equal points, eight centimeters in diameter. Any Jew, man, woman, or child, seen without the star would be arrested.

I heard mother ask my father, "Moshe, what is going to happen to us? Jews must wear humiliating markings on their clothes called the 'Jew badge.' Is this yellow star a 'Jew badge'?" If so, I don't know if I'm proud to be a Jew. We are not marked for being criminals, only for being Jews. Our neighbors look at us without acknowledgement. Yesterday, they were picking mushrooms with me, and today they hate me. Why?"

My father replied, "It is because of the restrictions. Although we aren't allowed to mingle with our non-Jewish friends, we are really lucky that we have not been deported."

It wasn't long afterwards that the drummer returned to the street and commanded, "All Jews be ready to relocate. Each person is to take a bag not to exceed twenty-five kilos." He also commanded us to give up our valuables.

I heard my mother say, "They are robbing us of our feelings to be worthy enough to own something of value."

Mother was making bundles for each one of us and she was crying. She must have had a premonition of danger or else she was making sure her family was protected. I watched her cry with each bundle she put into the suitcase. I wondered if my mother was hoping that we would come back soon. I had never seen her look so sad. When she stopped packing, she told me, "You and your brothers and sister must be very care-

3007

ful with your clothes because they will have to last you until we get back. Paint your name on your luggage."

Passover was the following week and our family was busy cleaning, putting away the usual dishes and silverware, getting out the holiday tableware, and preparing the special meal. The matzo's had been prepared months before Leizer was born, but I helped my mother prepare the charoset, the boiled eggs, and the fresh vegetables. At the Seder, the first day of Passover, David was excited, for he had been chosen to ask the four questions. Although he was only five, he knew his answers well. I was surprised when Hinda tried to chime in. The adults had just finished the final cup of wine when I looked toward the open door of the house. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. In the doorway, wearing a white cloak with a hood, was Elijah himself. He slowly moved toward the table and lifted the fifth glass of wine, sipped from it, and quietly drifted out the open door. All of us were amazed at what had happened. Elijah had really chosen our home this year! Mother and Father smiled with their eyes at Grandfather Isaac. I can remember feeling so secure, so sheltered, so peaceful. Tears filled my eyes as I looked around the table at my family. I was thankful for this time together, for this time with my family. Perhaps the war would soon be over.

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

Just across the mountain range, outside of a village in Lithuania, another teenage girl had lost her hope that the war might soon be over. Sabka, a sixteen-year-old girl, was standing in a line, naked and chilled, as she watched her father and the other men from her village digging a pit. She clung to her mother as they trembled in fear. It seemed like forever

before her father joined them in the middle of the long procession. Silently, she observed the Nazi soldiers shoot the first man in the line, and he tumbled into the grave he had just finished digging. There was no place to go – nowhere to hide. The soldiers took turns shooting their victims. To Sabka, the world was silent. She blocked out the screams...the moans. She heard no sounds from the forest, nor did she hear the rifles' volleys. As each person fell into the trench, she could feel the mountain shudder. Sabka watched the bullet enter her mother's neck in front of her and she braced herself. She felt no pain, only a sense of losing her balance and falling...falling...falling. Plummeling through dirt and blood, she came to rest beside her mother. Incredibly, Sabka was still alive and so was her mother. Before she had a chance to move, Sabka's father's body tumbled almost on top of her mother. It was inconceivable that there was still any life in the abyss of death. Both her father and her mother looked into her eyes and although they did not speak, Sabka saw their lids blink in the shadowy evening. Sabka didn't understand why she felt no pain. With bodies plunging down the ditch, Sabka still heard nothing. She felt the pressure of death and the shaking of the mountain. And then, all was still.

It was a ray of sunlight that brought her to consciousness. Birds were chirping somewhere; she could hear them. Something was pressing her. Had she slept or fainted? She couldn't be sure. As Sabka struggled to make sense of her surroundings, she saw her mother's eyes next to hers. They were open and staring lifelessly at Sabka. Her father blinked at her.

"Father?" she whispered.

"Go," his blink seemed to say.

"I cannot leave you here to die," Sabka thought.

He struggled to open and shut his eyes. Sabka knew that she must leave him. She started clawing her way through the mound of bodies above her. Pushing and tugging the limbs of the dead, occasionally she heard a groan from a dying neighbor. As far as she could distinguish, she was not injured. Her father must have pushed me into the trench before he was shot," she thought.

As Sabka reached the top of the heap of death, she was suddenly fearful that perhaps the soldiers might return. The mother's grave had not been covered with dirt. Would the soldiers be returning with more victims? Where could she go? She had no idea what she was going to do. Returning to her village would be suicide. She turned towards the mountains and ran.

Reaching a small stream, Sabka bathed the blood from her face, her hands, and her feet. Her entire body smelled of death. She wept as she thought of leaving her father and her mother in the pit. Realizing that she was alone, she prayed to God for peace to still her quivering body. Then she walked; she climbed. At sunset, Sabka settled herself under a thicket of small trees and slept.

"It is the second day of Passover," was her first thought when the warmth of the sun awakened her from an exhausted sleep. Fear kept her from crying aloud, but her body shook with sobs. She knew what she must do in order to survive. Hiding in the forest and surviving on rations she could forage would be her only hope. It was nearly midday when Sabka discovered a crevice between some rocks in the side of the mountain. Looking inside, she could see that the opening grew larger. She squeezed her body into the gap, her arms and legs scraping painfully against the rock as she tried to crawl in far enough so she wouldn't be seen. Amazingly, the opening led to a cave in

the side of the mountain. Water trickled from a spring. Sabka had found her new home.

1943 – 1944

*Psalm 31:13 "For I hear the slander of many;
there is terror on every side; they conspire against
me and plot to take my life."*

My grandfather, Isaac Seigelstein, was sick. Leizer cried incessantly because he was hungry. The war was progressing and everything was scarce. Mother knew that she had to have help.

"Moshe, you must somehow get a message to my mother to come to help me with the children and with your father," Mother implored.

"I am going to slip to the spa today to see if there is any news," Father answered. "I will try to go on to KishPolosh (Povlovo) and see if I can bring your mother and Bencie back with me."

"Just be careful, Moshe. We can't trust anyone. If it weren't absolutely necessary, I wouldn't ask you to take the risk, but I need help."

My father slipped out the back of the house and through the fields. He went to the spa where he talked to his trusted friend. The information he received at the spa was not good. The Hungarian Nyilosh had been to the resort nearly every day, talking with the patrons who frequented the mineral waters in hopes of easing rheumatism and other muscular diseases. The Nyilosh were now wearing uniforms and carrying handguns in holsters. Nazi sympathizer volunteers were seeking out Jews

and harassing them. The drummer had commanded a 6:00 PM curfew for all Jews.

Although my father knew that it would be perilous to try to get to KishPolosh (Povlovo), he decided to take the chance. Traveling by a path in the woods, he was grateful that the Nyilosh did not track him. When he reached his mother-in-law's home in the nearby village, she and my mother's brother Bencie were home alone. My mother's sisters were all married with small children. Living near Grandmother, they needed her as well. When Mendel Mermelstein, my maternal grandfather, had been killed in the first World War, Bencie had been a toddler. Now that Bencie was a young man, my grandmother was thankful for his strength.

Father arrived at the end of their midday meal. My grandmother offered him what bread was left and he ate hungrily. He explained that Isaac was sick and that Rachel could not get the baby to stop crying. Chaya and Bencie quickly gathered some belongings and some flour and began the journey with my father back to Poleno.

"Mother," I cried excitedly, "Grandmother and Bencie are coming through the yard with Father." 422

"Thank God," muttered my mother. "Please sit with your grandfather while I help them." 433

I sat beside my Grandfather Isaac and held his hand. It felt very warm. He looked at me and smiled. I felt so sorry for him because he was sick, and there was nothing I could do to help him. My mother had told me that he had a sugar disease (diabetes). I peeked under the covers to look at the bandage on his foot, but as I lifted the blanket, the movement caused him to grimace.

"Is it still hurting as much as yesterday?" I asked.

"Well," he said weakly, "I still feel pain in my big toe." 450

"But you haven't a big toe now, Grandfather," I explained. The doctors removed it to try to get rid of the infection." 470
 "I know, I know," Isaac replied, "but it still pains me." 479
 "Grandmother Chaya is here," I told him. "She will nurse you back to health." 490

"Perhaps she will," Grandfather replied, but he didn't seem convinced.

Later that evening I was listening to my mother, father, Bencie, and Grandmother talking in the kitchen.

"You are just going to have to nurse him," Grandmother said to my mother. 500 510

"But mother, he is almost two years old, and I have no milk for him," my mother protested. 517 520

"Your milk will come back," said Grandmother, "and don't worry about how old Leizer is. He's still a baby and with food so scarce, it will be the best way for him to stay healthy. Besides, spring will be here soon and then we can pick berries and maybe one of our cows will find its way back to us for milking." 530 540 550 560 570

"I'll try," mother said. She went into the empty bedroom and lifted Leizer to her breast. Immediately he started to nurse and his crying ceased. I could hear my mother whispering to him. "I love you," she said. 580

"He's quiet, finally," I thought to myself. "I will always take care of him, but I have no way of quieting him when he is hungry. Maybe grandmother is right and this will work." 600 610

Grandmother finally entered the room where I sat with my grandfather. When I saw her moving towards the bed, I flew into her arms. 620

"I'm so glad to see you, Grandmother. We've been sad because Grandfather Isaac is sick and the baby is hungry and we don't have enough to eat...." I rambled. 630 639

640
"Shhhh," said my grandmother. "I'm here now and I'll try to help. How are you, Isaac?" 652

663
"I'm not feeling so well," Grandfather Isaac replied. "I think I may have a slight fever. Maybe there's an infection that has spread from my toe. The doctor told me he'd taken it off. It's funny, though. I know in my mind my toe isn't there, but it still hurts me." 690

700
"Phantom pains," smiled Grandmother, "and you don't have a slight fever; you're burning up. Chana, please go draw some water from the well and put it in the wash basin. Bring it to me and you can help me wash your grandfather's face and arms." 710 740 744

"Yes, grandmother" I answered, glad to be useful.

That night, Mendel, Mayer, David, and I were laughing at Hinda and Leizer as they wrestled around the room. Hinda had just turned four and relished her role of being a big sister for my little brother. Father, Mother, Friedman, Bencie, and Grandmother were in the kitchen when we all heard a knocking at the front door.

"I'll check," said Father, but I could hear the fear in his voice. 746

Two men were huddled near the door of the duplex. They were cold and hungry. 750

55
"Do you have any bread you can spare?" the shorter man asked. "We need to rest before we resume our journey, and we are cold and hungry."

115
"Please," said the other man. "We have escaped from Poland." 770

My father welcomed the men and invited them to spend the night. My father and his friends were helping people who had escaped from Poland to safety. Their destination was

Palestine. Mother went into the room where the children had quieted. 780

"Quickly," she said. "Get ready for bed."

All six of us went to the room where we slept and lay down. Soon the younger children were asleep, but I could not sleep. I strained to listen to the low voices in the kitchen.

"It is beyond belief," I heard one of the strange men say. "The Germans are rounding up all the Jews in Poland; they are killing them and burying them in mass graves. The Nazis aren't just killing the men; they are murdering women and children. It is as if we aren't human to them. If I had not seen with my own eyes what was happening, I would not have believed this was possible." 800 810 820 830 840

"What should we do?" I heard my father ask. 850

760
"Come with us," said the other man. "If you do not, when the Germans come here, they will kill your children like they have in Poland." 870

880
"I don't think they will come here," said Mother softly. I think she was speaking more to herself than to anyone around her. "We are such a small town and a third of the community is Jewish. The war is almost over. We will be safe here. We will not go with them." 900

I could not sleep for the remainder of the night. I could not believe that the Germans were killing children as if they weren't human. I shivered under my down quilt. I was frightened.

The next morning, the two men were gone.

I found my father and asked him about the conversation I had overheard. "What have the children done? Why are the Germans killing children?" 921

Father answered, "The man was not himself, daughter. He didn't know what he was saying. Human beings don't do

such a thing. No one believes that the educated Germans are doing such things to human beings." 445 955

Grandmother woke me at 5:00 AM to bake. Although I grumbled, I was glad my grandmother included me in the kitchen chores. I was beginning to feel like an adult. While I watched over the oven, my grandmother went over to the other side of the duplex to check on my grandfather. She hurriedly returned and went to find Friedman and Bencie. The men rushed back to my grandfather's room. It wasn't long before I heard my mother and father join them, and I heard my mother crying softly. I knew in my heart that my beloved Grandfather Isaac was dead. I wept as I heard my father's words, "*Baruch dayan amet*. Blessed be the one true judge." 958

Bencie, Friedman, and Father sent Mother and Grandmother to gather water and towels to prepare the body. I woke the three older boys to sit with our grandfather's body while Father and Friedman went to make funeral arrangements. Father and Mother knew that it would be best to bury Grandfather before nightfall. Mendel left to go to the temple to ask Rabbi Goldman to come to our home.

Jewish friends and neighbors slipped quietly in and out of our home all day. Though they were concerned about their safety, they knew that my grandfather deserved the dignity of a proper burial. A small group of mourners walked to the cemetery that afternoon. Grandfather Isaac's body had been washed and dressed in the traditional *tachrichim* white burial shroud. Father had reverently placed Grandfather's prayer shawl on his body, cutting off one of the fringes to render it ineffective. Although I wasn't allowed to go to the burial, I knew that when the little group of friends reached the burial site, Father would begin by reciting the Kaddish. The rabbi would tear the clothing of Father and Uncle Friedman. The

rabbi would end the funeral service by speaking directly to Father and Friedman.

167 "*Hamakom y'nachem etchem b'toch sh'ar availai tziyon ee Yerushalayim*. May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem," he would say.

I learned later that my grandfather's burial was the last funeral held in the cemetery until after the war.

My family returned home after the funeral to sit Shiva. Miraculously, the seven days were completed without incident. Grandmother and Bencie returned home to KishPolosh (Povlovo) because my grandmother feared that one of her other daughters might need help with their children.

It was at this time that changes quickly began in our small town. One night my father and his brother Friedman went to friends' house to play cards and perform on the violin. My father played beautiful gypsy songs on his violin. I had helped Mother settle the children in bed for the evening, and I was just drifting to sleep when I heard cries for help from the side of the yard from the house next door to us. Nazi sympathizers had been waiting for the men to leave and had seized them and dragged them. Our friends were being beaten with clubs. I ran to get my father, and he met me at the door; he was covered with blood. Before I could say a word, he quickly locked the door and told me, "Go back to bed. This will quickly pass. Don't be afraid." 978 970

The next day, Friedman went to check on some of the men who had been beaten and when he returned home, he told my father that two of their friends had been taken away and that no one knew of their location.

I listened to Mother and Father pacing and talking all night. I knew my parents were planning to move their belongings and what food we had into the attic so that they

could hide the family. I was especially terrified for my father. Determined to help my parents, it took me a long time to go to sleep.



Sabka was frightened and freezing. She knew the Nazi officers were searching for her. It was hard for her to believe that she had been in her cave for almost two years. Surviving on stolen food and clothing, she had managed. Today she was afraid that her hiding place would be discovered. Earlier that morning she had crept down the mountain to a small farm. Sabka had nothing to eat and because the day was so cloudy, she thought it was night. As Sabka passed the clothesline she spotted a worn blanket drying. She stopped long enough to gather the blanket in her arms and to steal some food from the pigs. As she fled from the yard, she heard the woman's shouts of protest. 990

"Stop, stop, thief. Someone help me catch the thief. Dirty Jew!" 999

Although she hadn't spotted anyone running after her as she ran up the mountain path, Sabka knew that the woman would notify the authorities. She was quiet and tried to strain her ears to hear anyone approaching. It wasn't long before she heard the barking of dogs. She prayed to God that she wouldn't be discovered, but she had no hope of that now. She ate the swine's fare quickly, for she knew there was no point in saving the food. It was only a matter of time before the Nazi officers and their dogs would find her hiding place. The dogs were getting closer. She tore the thin, worn blanket and wrapped strips around her feet to try to keep them warm. Sabka thought, "Never will I be warm again." 990 995

The dogs were snarling at the crevice in the entrance of the cave. A beam of light shone through and she looked straight into it, into the eyes of a Nazi soldier.

"Herous du farfluchte Juden. Out you dirty Jew," he ordered. 994

Sabka thought that she was going to be shot on the spot. She exited the safety of her home, the cave that had sheltered her for almost two years. Trembling, she looked the soldier squarely in the eye. She was only eighteen, but she was resilient; she had endured incredible hardships. The Nazi slapped her across the face, and though she reeled from his blow, she stood again. 1000!

"I see we have a proud little girl here," he said. "You will learn to be proud where I am taking you," he continued sarcastically. 1010 1014

Sabka felt fear clutch at her heart, but she maintained her silence.

The Nazi stuck the nozzle of his rifle into her back and ordered, "March." 1015

Sabka followed another soldier down the mountain, all the time followed by the man who had struck her face. The rifle's butt was pressed painfully in her back and when the man stumbled over the rocks on the path, she was fearful the gun would discharge. When she reached the bottom of the trail, she saw a truck with several people sitting in the open back. The soldier ordered her into the rear of the truck and she quickly and quietly joined the others.

Many times on the journey Sabka wondered why the soldiers were taking them such a long way. "Why don't they kill us in the same way they murdered my parents?" 1020 1028

Three days later, the soldiers ordered Sabka and the others to climb out of the truck bed. They were cold, sore, and

hungry. They had not had food or drink for the three days they had been traveling. Sabka and the other women were separated from the men and Sabka was processed into what would become her new home for the next eighteen months... Auschwitz.

SPRING 1944

Deuteronomy 28:41 "You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity."

Jews from neighboring towns were being taken to my school to await deportation. I had no idea what would happen to these families, but I couldn't help thinking of the men who had visited our house during the winter and the words I had heard them say to my father.

Father, Friedman, and Mother built a hiding place in the attic of the duplex. Before Passover, Mark, Mayer, and David helped our parents take blankets, pillows, and water up to the attic. I tried to play with Hinda and Leizer and keep them quiet.

One of Father's friends was a righteous Christian with a Jewish wife; he was also a policeman. This man offered to seal our house from the outside so it would look as if our family had already left. He wanted us to take his wife with us. Father and Mother welcomed the policeman's wife to go into hiding with our family. We called her *Nemesh Nanie*, but her name was Mrs. Nemesh. She was a little sweet lady with brown hair, light skin, and green eyes. Mrs. Nemesh didn't know she was Jewish until Hitler invaded our country. Her family had been assimilated Jews who had not practiced Judaism.

Finally, the attic was ready and Father called us together and explained, "We must be very quiet all the time because

1050 if they hear us they will take us away. I understand that all Jews are being taken to a place to work until after the war. Hopefully, our family will not be discovered. We will sleep in the attic each night and during the day, we will come downstairs. The reason we cannot put a light on downstairs in the evening is because we will be discovered from the outside. It will be safer not to go downstairs at all at night. Mother will not be able to cook because the smoke from the chimney will give us away; we must do the best we can with very little."

Mother continued, "The most important thing is that we remain together as a family." 1160

I was upset that my friend Olga had already left with her family to go to Budapest; I missed her. Praying every day for the war to soon be over, I was happy that God was watching over my own family so that we could be together in our own home in our village.

One morning before Passover, Mother was readying the special tableware. 1170

"Chana, could you come here please? I need to speak with you."

"Yes, Mother," I answered her. "Do you need some help?" 1180

"No, I need to go over a few things with you." 1190

Mother opened her hand and in the center of her palm were four small diamonds.

"Mother, why are you holding your diamonds in your hands?" I cried. 1200

1210 "When the Nazis demanded our valuables, I kept these diamonds for you and for our family," she replied.

"What am I to do with the diamonds, Mother?" I was troubled. 1220 1225

1230 "I'm going to sew them into the hem of your skirt. I don't think the Nazis will notice them. Never forget that they are in your possession. Guard them closely and never sell them, unless...you are hungry...then you may use the diamonds to buy bread. When the Nazis took our valuables, they also took our feelings of being worthy enough to own something of value." 1240 1250 1260 1270 1280 1290 1300 1310 1320 1330 1340 1350 1360 1370 1380 1390 1400 1410 1420 1430 1440 1450 1460 1470 1480 1490 1500 1510 1520 1530 1540 1550 1560 1570 1580 1590 1600 1610 1620 1630 1640 1650 1660 1670 1680 1690 1700 1710 1720 1730 1740 1750 1760 1770 1780 1790 1800 1810 1820 1830 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030 2040 2050 2060 2070 2080 2090 2100 2110 2120 2130 2140 2150 2160 2170 2180 2190 2200 2210 2220 2230 2240 2250 2260 2270 2280 2290 2300 2310 2320 2330 2340 2350 2360 2370 2380 2390 2400 2410 2420 2430 2440 2450 2460 2470 2480 2490 2500 2510 2520 2530 2540 2550 2560 2570 2580 2590 2600 2610 2620 2630 2640 2650 2660 2670 2680 2690 2700 2710 2720 2730 2740 2750 2760 2770 2780 2790 2800 2810 2820 2830 2840 2850 2860 2870 2880 2890 2900 2910 2920 2930 2940 2950 2960 2970 2980 2990 3000 3010 3020 3030 3040 3050 3060 3070 3080 3090 3100 3110 3120 3130 3140 3150 3160 3170 3180 3190 3200 3210 3220 3230 3240 3250 3260 3270 3280 3290 3300 3310 3320 3330 3340 3350 3360 3370 3380 3390 3400 3410 3420 3430 3440 3450 3460 3470 3480 3490 3500 3510 3520 3530 3540 3550 3560 3570 3580 3590 3600 3610 3620 3630 3640 3650 3660 3670 3680 3690 3700 3710 3720 3730 3740 3750 3760 3770 3780 3790 3800 3810 3820 3830 3840 3850 3860 3870 3880 3890 3900 3910 3920 3930 3940 3950 3960 3970 3980 3990 4000 4010 4020 4030 4040 4050 4060 4070 4080 4090 4100 4110 4120 4130 4140 4150 4160 4170 4180 4190 4200 4210 4220 4230 4240 4250 4260 4270 4280 4290 4300 4310 4320 4330 4340 4350 4360 4370 4380 4390 4400 4410 4420 4430 4440 4450 4460 4470 4480 4490 4500 4510 4520 4530 4540 4550 4560 4570 4580 4590 4600 4610 4620 4630 4640 4650 4660 4670 4680 4690 4700 4710 4720 4730 4740 4750 4760 4770 4780 4790 4800 4810 4820 4830 4840 4850 4860 4870 4880 4890 4900 4910 4920 4930 4940 4950 4960 4970 4980 4990 5000 5010 5020 5030 5040 5050 5060 5070 5080 5090 5100 5110 5120 5130 5140 5150 5160 5170 5180 5190 5200 5210 5220 5230 5240 5250 5260 5270 5280 5290 5300 5310 5320 5330 5340 5350 5360 5370 5380 5390 5400 5410 5420 5430 5440 5450 5460 5470 5480 5490 5500 5510 5520 5530 5540 5550 5560 5570 5580 5590 5600 5610 5620 5630 5640 5650 5660 5670 5680 5690 5700 5710 5720 5730 5740 5750 5760 5770 5780 5790 5800 5810 5820 5830 5840 5850 5860 5870 5880 5890 5900 5910 5920 5930 5940 5950 5960 5970 5980 5990 6000 6010 6020 6030 6040 6050 6060 6070 6080 6090 6100 6110 6120 6130 6140 6150 6160 6170 6180 6190 6200 6210 6220 6230 6240 6250 6260 6270 6280 6290 6300 6310 6320 6330 6340 6350 6360 6370 6380 6390 6400 6410 6420 6430 6440 6450 6460 6470 6480 6490 6500 6510 6520 6530 6540 6550 6560 6570 6580 6590 6600 6610 6620 6630 6640 6650 6660 6670 6680 6690 6700 6710 6720 6730 6740 6750 6760 6770 6780 6790 6800 6810 6820 6830 6840 6850 6860 6870 6880 6890 6900 6910 6920 6930 6940 6950 6960 6970 6980 6990 7000 7010 7020 7030 7040 7050 7060 7070 7080 7090 7100 7110 7120 7130 7140 7150 7160 7170 7180 7190 7200 7210 7220 7230 7240 7250 7260 7270 7280 7290 7300 7310 7320 7330 7340 7350 7360 7370 7380 7390 7400 7410 7420 7430 7440 7450 7460 7470 7480 7490 7500 7510 7520 7530 7540 7550 7560 7570 7580 7590 7600 7610 7620 7630 7640 7650 7660 7670 7680 7690 7700 7710 7720 7730 7740 7750 7760 7770 7780 7790 7800 7810 7820 7830 7840 7850 7860 7870 7880 7890 7900 7910 7920 7930 7940 7950 7960 7970 7980 7990 8000 8010 8020 8030 8040 8050 8060 8070 8080 8090 8100 8110 8120 8130 8140 8150 8160 8170 8180 8190 8200 8210 8220 8230 8240 8250 8260 8270 8280 8290 8300 8310 8320 8330 8340 8350 8360 8370 8380 8390 8400 8410 8420 8430 8440 8450 8460 8470 8480 8490 8500 8510 8520 8530 8540 8550 8560 8570 8580 8590 8600 8610 8620 8630 8640 8650 8660 8670 8680 8690 8700 8710 8720 8730 8740 8750 8760 8770 8780 8790 8800 8810 8820 8830 8840 8850 8860 8870 8880 8890 8900 8910 8920 8930 8940 8950 8960 8970 8980 8990 9000 9010 9020 9030 9040 9050 9060 9070 9080 9090 9100 9110 9120 9130 9140 9150 9160 9170 9180 9190 9200 9210 9220 9230 9240 9250 9260 9270 9280 9290 9300 9310 9320 9330 9340 9350 9360 9370 9380 9390 9400 9410 9420 9430 9440 9450 9460 9470 9480 9490 9500 9510 9520 9530 9540 9550 9560 9570 9580 9590 9600 9610 9620 9630 9640 9650 9660 9670 9680 9690 9700 9710 9720 9730 9740 9750 9760 9770 9780 9790 9800 9810 9820 9830 9840 9850 9860 9870 9880 9890 9900 9910 9920 9930 9940 9950 9960 9970 9980 9990 10000 10010 10020 10030 10040 10050 10060 10070 10080 10090 10100 10110 10120 10130 10140 10150 10160 10170 10180 10190 10200 10210 10220 10230 10240 10250 10260 10270 10280 10290 10300 10310 10320 10330 10340 10350 10360 10370 10380 10390 10400 10410 10420 10430 10440 10450 10460 10470 10480 10490 10500 10510 10520 10530 10540 10550 10560 10570 10580 10590 10600 10610 10620 10630 10640 10650 10660 10670 10680 10690 10700 10710 10720 10730 10740 10750 10760 10770 10780 10790 10800 10810 10820 10830 10840 10850 10860 10870 10880 10890 10900 10910 10920 10930 10940 10950 10960 10970 10980 10990 11000 11010 11020 11030 11040 11050 11060 11070 11080 11090 11100 11110 11120 11130 11140 11150 11160 11170 11180 11190 11200 11210 11220 11230 11240 11250 11260 11270 11280 11290 11300 11310 11320 11330 11340 11350 11360 11370 11380 11390 11400 11410 11420 11430 11440 11450 11460 11470 11480 11490 11500 11510 11520 11530 11540 11550 11560 11570 11580 11590 11600 11610 11620 11630 11640 11650 11660 11670 11680 11690 11700 11710 11720 11730 11740 11750 11760 11770 11780 11790 11800 11810 11820 11830 11840 11850 11860 11870 11880 11890 11900 11910 11920 11930 11940 11950 11960 11970 11980 11990 12000 12010 12020 12030 12040 12050 12060 12070 12080 12090 12100 12110 12120 12130 12140 12150 12160 12170 12180 12190 12200 12210 12220 12230 12240 12250 12260 12270 12280 12290 12300 12310 12320 12330 12340 12350 12360 12370 12380 12390 12400 12410 12420 12430 12440 12450 12460 12470 12480 12490 12500 12510 12520 12530 12540 12550 12560 12570 12580 12590 12600 12610 12620 12630 12640 12650 12660 12670 12680 12690 12700 12710 12720 12730 12740 12750 12760 12770 12780 12790 12800 12810 12820 12830 12840 12850 12860 12870 12880 12890 12900 12910 12920 12930 12940 12950 12960 12970 12980 12990 13000 13010 13020 13030 13040 13050 13060 13070 13080 13090 13100 13110 13120 13130 13140 13150 13160 13170 13180 13190 13200 13210 13220 13230 13240 13250 13260 13270 13280 13290 13300 13310 13320 13330 13340 13350 13360 13370 13380 13390 13400 13410 13420 13430 13440 13450 13460 13470 13480 13490 13500 13510 13520 13530 13540 13550 13560 13570 13580 13590 13600 13610 13620 13630 13640 13650 13660 13670 13680 13690 13700 13710 13720 13730 13740 13750 13760 13770 13780 13790 13800 13810 13820 13830 13840 13850 13860 13870 13880 13890 13900 13910 13920 13930 13940 13950 13960 13970 13980 13990 14000 14010 14020 14030 14040 14050 14060 14070 14080 14090 14100 14110 14120 14130 14140 14150 14160 14170 14180 14190 14200 14210 14220 14230 14240 14250 14260 14270 14280 14290 14300 14310 14320 14330 14340 14350 14360 14370 14380 14390 14400 14410 14420 14430 14440 14450 14460 14470 14480 14490 14500 14510 14520 14530 14540 14550 14560 14570 14580 14590 14600 14610 14620 14630 14640 14650 14660 14670 14680 14690 14700 14710 14720 14730 14740 14750 14760 14770 14780 14790 14800 14810 14820 14830 14840 14850 14860 14870 14880 14890 14900 14910 14920 14930 14940 14950 14960 14970 14980 14990 15000 15010 15020 15030 15040 15050 15060 15070 15080 15090 15100 15110 15120 15130 15140 15150 15160 15170 15180 15190 15200 15210 15220 15230 15240 15250 15260 15270 15280 15290 15300 15310 15320 15330 15340 15350 15360 15370 15380 15390 15400 15410 15420 15430 15440 15450 15460 15470 15480 15490 15500 15510 15520 15530 15540 15550 15560 15570 15580 15590 15600 15610 15620 15630 15640 15650 15660 15670 15680 15690 15700 15710 15720 15730 15740 15750 15760 15770 15780 15790 15800 15810 15820 15830 15840 15850 15860 15870 15880 15890 15900 15910 15920 15930 15940 15950 15960 15970 15980 15990 16000 16010 16020 16030 16040 16050 16060 16070 16080 16090 16100 16110 16120 16130 16140 16150 16160 16170 16180 16190 16200 16210 16220 16230 16240 16250 16260 16270 16280 16290 16300 16310 16320 16330 16340 16350 16360 16370 16380 16390 16400 16410 16420 16430 16440 16450 16460 16470 16480 16490 16500 16510 16520 16530 16540 16550 16560 16570 16580 16590 16600 16610 16620 16630 16640 16650 16660 16670 16680 16690 16700 16710 16720 16730 16740 16750 16760 16770 16780 16790 16800 16810 16820 16830 16840 16850 16860 16870 16880 16890 16900 16910 16920 16930 16940 16950 16960 16970 16980 16990 17000 17010 17020 17030 17040 17050 17060 17070 17080 17090 17100 17110 17120 17130 17140 17150 17160 17170 17180 17190 17200 17210 17220 17230 17240 17250 17260 17270 17280 17290 17300 17310 17320 17330 17340 17350 17360 17370 17380 17390 17400 17410 17420 17430 17440 17450 17460 17470 17480 17490 17500 17510 17520 17530 17540 17550 17560 17570 17580 17590 17600 17610 17620 17630 17640 17650 17660 17670 17680 17690 17700 17710 17720 17730 17740 17750 17760 17770 17780 17790 17800 17810 17820 17830 17840 17850 17860 17870 17880 17890 17900 17910 17920 17930 17940 17950 17960 17970 17980 17990 18000 18010 18020 18030 18040 18050 18060 18070 18080 18090 18100 18110 18120 18130 18140 18150 18160 18170 18180 18190 18200 18210 18220 18230 18240 18250 18260 18270 18280 18290 18300 18310 18320 18330 18340 18350 18360 18370 18380 18390 18400 18410 18420 18430 18440 18450 18460 18470 18480 18490 18500 18510 18520 18530 18540 18550 18560 18570 18580 18590 18600 18610 18620 18630 18640 18650 18660 18670 18680 18690 18700 18710 18720 18730 18740 18750 18760 18770 18780 18790 18800 18810 18820 18830 18840 18850 18860 18870 18880 18890 18900 18910 18920 18930 18940 18950 18960 18970 18980 18990 19000 19010 19020 19030 19040 19050 19060 19070 19080 19090 19100 19110 19120 19130 19140 19150 19160 19170 19180 19190 19200 19210 19220 19230 19240 19250 19260 19270 19280 19290 19300 19310 19320 19330 19340 19350 19360 19370 19380 19390 19400 19410 19420 19430 19440 19450 19460 19470 19480 19490 19500 19510 19520 19530 19540 19550 19560 19570 19580 19590 19600 19610 19620 19630 19640 19650 19660 19670 19680 19690 19700 19710 19720 19730 19740 19750 19760 19770 19780 19790 19800 19810 19820 19830 19840 19850 19860 19870 19880 19890 19900 19910 19920 19930 19940 19950 19960 19970 19980 19990 20000 20010 20020 20030 20040 20050 20060 20070 20080 20090 20100 20110 20120 20130 20140 20150 20160 20170 20180 20190 20200 20210 20220 20230 20240 20250 20260 20270 20280 20290 20300 20310 20320 20330 20340 20350 20360 20370 20380 20390 20400 20410 20420 20430 20440 20450 20460 20470 20480 20490 20500 20510 20520 20530 20540 20550 20560 20570 20580 20590 20600 20610 20620 20630 20640 20650 20660 20670 20680 20690 20700 20710 20720 20730 20740 20750 20760 20770 20780 20790 20800 20810 20820 20830 20840 20850 20860 20870 20880 20890 20900 20910 20920 20930 20940 20950 20960 20970 20980 20990 21000 21010 21020 21030 21040 21050 21060 21070 21080 21090 21100 21110 21120 21130 21140 21150 21160 21170 21180 21190 21200 21210 21220 21230 21240 21250 21260 21270 21280 21290 21300 21310 21320 21330 21340 21350 21360 21370 21380 21390 21400 21410 21420 21430 21440 21450 21460 21470 21480 21490 21500 21510 21520 21530 21540 21550 21560 21570 21580 21590 21600 21610 21620 21630 21640 216

could hear children crying. When I finally reached the *Furdo*, I was trembling.

Father's friend quickly pulled me into the spa and yelled, "Why are you here? Doesn't your father know it is not safe?"

I explained to my father's friend, the new owner, that my father wanted to see if he could help with the Jews in the school; I told him that the children were hungry. I asked him if he knew where all the Jews were being sent and if he could send my father a newspaper.

He replied, "Tell your father to be very careful and not to let you out of the house again. The Nyilosh are taking all the Jews to the school and then to the railroad station and I don't know where they are going. Because Poleno has a railroad, the Nyilosh are bringing Jews from all over the county to the railroad station here for deportation."

He warned me to return home quickly and not to risk being seen. "Don't travel by the street. Go home through the fields so they don't take you away without your family."

I ran home as quickly as I could, crying and afraid. I was so glad to see my father's face.

"Father, I can not leave the house again. I was so frightened," I whimpered as I handed him the newspaper and relayed the message from his friend.

"I'm sorry, Chana," Father said. "I didn't realize the situation was so grave."

Later, I overheard my mother and father discussing the fate of their children. My mother told my father that she wanted to give all of her children away, not because she didn't love us, but because she wanted to save us. If the children could be hidden with non-Jewish families, my mother thought that we might be safe. My mother's heart was torn because her children no longer played or smiled, and because she loved us so much,

she tried to save us, even if it meant giving us up. Father asked her if anyone had agreed to keep us. Mother replied, "No, even though we have raised them with so much devotion and care, no one will help us." My mother was willing to do anything to save us from the SS.

When I was in the attic with the other children, I knew that my father was very worried. When my mother and father joined us that evening, Father told us that the family should try to rest and be ready for Passover the following day.

"We will eat our first Seder early," Father said, "but we will observe our Seder."

The family celebrated the first day of Passover and we felt blessed to be able to be together in our home. On the second night of Passover, I heard men stomping in the yard. Father and Mother also heard the sounds. I heard the thud of an ax and the splintering of the wood which sealed the front door of the duplex. Nazi soldiers, along with the feather-headed policemen, rushed up the ladder leading to the attic as if they knew exactly where we were hiding.

"Someone has betrayed us," Mother whispered.

I heard the feather-headed Hungarian policemen, "It wóhok Zidowk. Here are Jews." The feathers standing tall in their helmets, guns on their shoulders, they staged this raid at night when they were least expected.

"Jew! Out!" screamed the soldiers.

When I saw these Hungarian policemen, I was so frightened. I couldn't believe that they were coming to hurt us. Having grown up with these men protecting us, I couldn't believe what they were doing.

My mother and father tried to keep us calm in the midst of the pandemonium. Leizer and Hinda were wailing, but the older children were too frightened to say anything.

1500

"Quickly," Mother said, "gather your cases and put on as much clothing as you can." 1501

As I pulled my skirt over my night clothes, I felt a bulge in the hem of my skirt. Running my fingers over the little lump, it was a moment before I remembered.

"Mother's diamonds," I thought. 1503

The Nazis herded my family and *Nemesh Nanie* into the street. All of the neighboring Jewish families were already gone, but the Jewish people from the county were assembling. Many of the men had been beaten and were bloody. The Kokosh (slang for Hungarian police) police and the Nyilosh began marching the throng towards the train station. Anyone who stepped out of line was beaten with a rubber hose and pushed back into the line. They told us that we were going to be relocated to a ghetto. This word was derived from the Jewish word *get*, which meant separating, but I didn't know what a ghetto was; I just felt like I had done something very bad.

As the family marched to the station, I couldn't see the road ahead. I was facing my past. The place where I had been born was disappearing. Would I ever see my home again? I saw some of my "friends" on the side of the road cheering on the Nazis that herded us away. They were yelling, "We don't want the Jews in our town." 1511

I didn't believe what I was hearing. They had been my friends yesterday; why did they hate me today? At the train station, everyone was ordered to board the open boxcars. Neighbors helped each other to get the sick and elderly on board the train.

I asked, "Father, do you know where we are going?"

"No, Chana, but we must stay together." 1526

In the evening, the train reached a destination in Szolyva, and from there our family traveled on trucks to Munkacs-

Sajovits ghetto. I could not believe my eyes. As far as I could see there were people. The former brick factory now was surrounded by a fence and was now a home for thousands. No bricks were being manufactured there now...just people suffering everywhere. My family and I located in the division of the ghetto known as Sajovits. The buildings overflowed with people, suitcases, and suffering.

Incredibly, one of the first people Mother and I saw was Grandmother Chaya. 1531

"Thank God you are here," said my mother. "Well, I guess we should praise him for small blessings. I wish none of us were here, but I'm so glad you will be with us." 1540 1557

Mother and Father asked about Bencie, but I could not hear the answer. I was afraid to question them and I could see the anxiety on my parents' faces. 1565

"Let's try to find a place to settle," Grandmother suggested to Mother. 1570

"I saw an area not far from here where perhaps we can sit, but I don't think there's room for us to set up shelter." 1580 1590

"We must do our best," Father commented. 1600

On a bare section of compact earth our family positioned suitcases to form a small barrier to offer us a little privacy. Grandmother and Mother removed tablecloths from their luggage and tried to make a small tent. All of my brothers and Hinda and I put our suitcases on the ground under our "tent." This would be where we would sleep.

In the ghetto, we had very little food and water was scarce. Once a day we were allowed to drink the water from the river surrounding the ghetto. We could not wash our clothes or our bodies; we could only drink. We children were always afraid of being taken away from our parents or of being beaten.

The Nazis came through the ghetto every day and took men and boys to work. Some of them never came back. When the men did return, they were weak and hungry. This was their daily ritual. I really could not believe that we were living and surviving in these conditions. I had been uprooted from my home and my family had been humiliated. My family's property had been taken away from us and we had been herded like cattle into this terrible place. Lines for the bathroom were endless. The feather-headed policemen who had trampled on our self-esteem, the Gentile neighbors who had been afraid to say good-bye, and the villagers that lined the streets to cheer the Nazis that were taking me away....now they were all on the other side of the fence, a very tall fence, and I knew it.

People stared at my family from behind the tall fence, yet on my side of the fence, God made it all bearable. We were making it! I began to grow accustomed to life in the ghetto - seeing families, playing with children, watching mothers suckling their infants, hearing fathers talking to sons about important things. I watched embraces and scoldings, tears and laughter, sadness and pain. On my side of the fence there was love and respect for each other, and it kept us close.

When the cattle trains came, we realized that the ghetto was also a holding place for relocation. The SS announced that the ghetto residents were going to be transferred to the vineyard in Tokay, Hungary. Hitler, however, had declared an assault on Hungarian Jews during his Final Solution. The Final Solution meant that not one Jew would survive the war to bear witness. In fifty-four days, on 147 cattle trains, 437,402 Hungarian Jews were in Auschwitz. That made our region *Juden Rein* - free of Jews. Everyone was willing and ready to leave the hellish place. Everyone believed we were going to Tokay to make wine.

I asked, "Father, if we are going to Tokay to work in the vineyards, why are we in cattle cars?" 1628

"Tokay is not very far, Chana. It won't be bad." Father answered.

But when the SS forced one hundred people in each box car and gave us a small pail to use as a bathroom, I knew that something was very wrong. As the doors were closed to the cattle car, everyone inside was in complete darkness. A crack in the wall was the only light anyone had.

Father was standing by the crack to see how far we were from Tokay. In the boxcar, conditions were horrendous. Some people were holding on to each other; most of them were struggling to stay alive. The children were crying; they were hungry and cold. When the pail filled up, the smell was unbearable. I was sitting on the dirty floor, watching everyone suffer. Hungry, thirsty, in complete darkness, my mother held our hands to keep us alert and to reassure us that this horror would soon be over. She told us happy stories, but the rhythmic sound of the wheels was louder than her voice, and we couldn't hear those stories. She was trying to shelter us from the pain. Other people were crying aloud; some people were banging on the wall to get out. Most of the people were praying to either die or to get out of the cattle car. My father saw through the crack that we were not going to Tokay to make wine. 1630

"They lied to us," Father said aloud. "We just crossed our border into Poland." 1634

I was holding my two-year-old brother, Leizer, in my arms and he cried persistently, not for food or for water, but only to go home. I promised him that he would be home soon, but when my father said the train was heading to Poland, I remembered again about what the men had said about the SS

killing the children. I promised myself that I would not let the SS take my little brother from me.

A short distance after the train passed the city of Oswiencim, Poland, the train stopped and backed up. Then it slowly pulled forward, as if it allowed another train entrance or exit. We had been on this cattle train for about five days, but it seemed like an eternity. The whole time we had been on the train, I had wished most for the doors to open and for some food and water for the children so they would stop crying. I had wished I could go to a bathroom like a real human being. I had been afraid that everyone would suffocate, because some people had died from the heat and the stench. Finally, though, the doors opened and all of the miserable occupants breathed in the fresh air for the first time in days.

Instead of letting us go to the bathroom or getting food and water for us, the SS were pointing rifles, yelling, *Herous du farfluchte Juden. Out you dirty Jews.*"

As I adjusted my eyes to the light, I saw four more trains loaded with people alongside the one I was on. People waiting to get off the other trains were in the same condition that we were. When I looked down at the ground, suitcases were everywhere. Pebbles covered the ground and everything appeared muddy.

The SS screamed again, "*Herous du farfluchte Juden. Out you dirty Jews! Leave your suitcases by the train. Your men will bring them to you later.*"

I stepped from the train, still holding my baby brother. I thought to myself, "Things will be better here. It will never be as bad as it has been on that train." I was wrong!

Exhausted and ravenous, Sabka carried her bricks from one side of Auschwitz to the other. Her mind and her gnawing

stomach functioned as one. Diluted, thin soup and a crust of bread – each footstep brought her closer to dinner.

MOTHER'S DIAMONDS

Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his chosen people, his treasured possession."

Even though it was spring, it was very cold as we left the cattle car. I had no idea where the train had stopped. A man in a striped jacket came over and offered to carry the children for my mother. My mother refused but asked him where we were and he replied, "Auschwitz." ¹⁶⁷⁹ Mother heard his reply, but didn't understand what he meant. None of us knew what "Auschwitz" was. I tried to help my pitiful grandmother, but the SS and Polish guards pushed her away from me. Mother took Leizer from my arms and held him tightly. She instructed me, ¹⁶⁸⁰ "Hold Hinda's hand and do not let her go so she will not get lost."

"I promise I won't, Mother. Come on, Hinda. Be a big girl now," I said to my little four-year-old sister. ¹⁷⁰⁰

I tried again to get my suitcase, but the SS screamed at me to leave the baggage near the train and again said, "Your men ¹⁷¹⁰ will bring them to you later." ¹⁷¹⁵

We walked alongside the train. The SS shouted for the men to line up on one side of the landing and the women on the other. Mendel, Mayer, and David were with Father; Leizer, Hinda, and I stayed with our mother. The man in the striped jacket asked Mother again if he could help her with the

children, but Mother refused. In the midst of the confusion, I spotted smoke rising from chimneys in the distance. "Look, Mother, there are the factories where we will work." She paid no mind to me in the chaos; she was trying to hold the family together.

One SS man, with a smiling face wearing white gloves and carrying a baton-like stick in his hand, appeared in front of us. He pointed his stick at Mother and ordered her to put my little brother Leizer down and go to the right.

"Put the child down and go to the right," he yelled.

My mother was determined to keep her children together. "My children will go with me," she glaringly told him.

The man became so angry that he picked his club up and and struck me deliberately on my wrist with such force that I let go of little Hinda's hand. Our wrists were bleeding and Hinda was crying. The man separated me from my mother and baby brother and sister. Mother grabbed Hinda and begged for the man to let me come with her, but he refused. As I pleaded with the man to go with my family, he pushed me away from them.

I stood sobbing and alone among thousands of people. I heard my mother call out to me.

"Don't cry, Chana. I will come for you later." That was the last time I heard my mother's voice.

I watched as my mother and my two younger siblings walked past the trucks that were for the crippled and elderly people; they entered a low bunker behind the barbed-wire fences. I was left standing in a group of thousands of women from all over Hungary, but suddenly I was aware of my age... thirteen and alone. I remembered my mother telling me to act like an adult and I was determined to do exactly as Mother had instructed.

"I will make you proud, Mother," I thought.

Later, as I was being herded into a huge building by SS men and women and their vicious dogs, I saw my father and younger brothers entering the same low bunker which Mother, Hinda, and Leizer had entered. The line into the bunker was long, but I assumed that all my family, except for myself, would be reunited in the long, low house. I hoped that someone would care for the children so that my parents and I could go to work. Taking comfort in that thought, I knew that I must be strong so that I could soon join them.

We women were directed inside the massive room and we were commanded to strip off all of our clothing. One of the SS yelled, "Take your clothes and shoes off and hold them in your hands. Put your valuables in the bin." The SS men and women were holding big German Shepherd dogs on leashes, and afraid that one of the dogs might attack me, I quickly began removing my layers of clothing. Slipping my skirt from under my feet, I felt the slight bulge in the edging.

"Oh, thank God. I almost forgot," I thought.

I quickly tore the hem and removed the small diamonds. Balling my hand into a fist, I held them tightly as I discarded my clothing.

Shivering and naked, I stood holding my mother's diamonds. I was determined that these wicked men and women would never take my mother's diamonds – the dignity of my family – from me. I moved into another area where my head was completely shaved. In the next section, I held out my arm and the number 61397 was tattooed on it. When I saw women checking for valuables in body cavities, I quickly popped the small diamonds into my mouth and held them under my tongue. In less than an hour, I had been stripped

naked, shaved, and branded....but I still had hope that maybe I would find my family.

I panicked when I saw women workers removing fillings and crowns, pulling gold teeth. Although I didn't have any gold teeth, I had my mother's diamonds in my mouth. I knew that if the diamonds were discovered, they would be taken away and I would be shot for not putting them into the bin. Impulsively, I gathered saliva into my mouth and swished the diamonds around to the back of my throat and out of fear I swallowed them.

At least I still have them," I thought. I knew that for the time being, the diamonds were safe.

Water trickling from the showers was cold, yet refreshing after my abysmal journey. After the delousing, an SS woman ordered us to take a piece of garment and mine was a pajama top. This was to be my only article of clothing. As I left to go outside to line up, at the door was a huge mirror. I was forced to look into this large mirror. I didn't recognize myself. When I saw myself, I felt reduced to a number that represented a nothing.

"These evil people have destroyed my identity and my dignity," I realized. "This is a process of dehumanizing me. They have taken my name and given me a number."

The SS pushed us out to the courtyard and ordered me and the other women to line up in rows of five and they marched us into a place called Birkenau - a place of evil. It was spring, but flowers or grass did not grow here. The sky was as gray as the mud under my feet. When the SS locked the electric barbed-wire gates behind us, I felt in my heart that I would never get out.

The SS marched one thousand of us to a wooden barrack; this was our luxury housing. In the barrack was a long stove

in the middle to provide heat, but it was never lit so there was no warmth. Ten of us were assigned to one bunk. Our daily ration was watery soup every twenty-four hours. In my bunk, we did not have our own individual cups for the soup. We were given a little pail about the size of a quart jar and we passed it around and shared a couple of sips of the soup. Sometimes there wasn't enough to go around. One woman in my bunk asked, "Why is this soup so thin?"

A woman that worked in the kitchen whispered, "Shhh. The SS are giving us chemicals to destroy our reproductive organs."

After *zeil appel* roll call that evening, I squeezed in the bunk between my bunkmates. Never had I tried to sleep like this before. When one woman rolled over, the entire ten women had to turn with her. I was miserable, and I was so frightened.

As I lay there, I thought about my mother. Why hadn't she come for me? Ideas filled my mind. I knew that my mother must be very worried about me, so I decided to try to go to the long, low house where I had seen her enter. I wanted to look for her because I was afraid she wouldn't recognize me with my shaved head and the one garment. Terrified, I crept out of the bunk toward the doorway of the barracks. The kapo, a woman carrying out the orders of the SS, spotted me and screamed, "Where are you going?"

Although I was trembling, I replied, "I am going to find my mother. She was supposed to come for me and I'm afraid she won't recognize me."

The kapo stared at me incredulously. "Do you know the meaning of sabotage?" she yelled. "If you behave this way in my block, you will be sent to the gas chamber. I am respon-

1870
sible for your conduct and sabotage will not be tolerated. This is your only warning." 1979

Then the *blockelteste*, a woman in charge of the thousand people in the barracks, pointed out the door toward the smoke coming out of the chimneys and shouted, "Your mother is just about now coming out of one of those chimneys and if you don't go back to your bunk, all of you will die today. Do you understand?" 1910

I was so confused and upset. I went back to my bunk because I didn't want anybody to die. I did not believe the *blockelteste*. My mother was thirty-two years old and beautiful. As I tried to go to sleep, I prayed that when I woke that the madness which surrounded me would disappear. Sleep, however, was elusive. These living conditions were absolutely unspeakable. I could hear the cattle trains coming and going, barking dogs, guns shooting, and cries of desperation in different languages. These atrocities, combined with my sleeplessness, gave me a vivid sense of existing in a factory of death.

The barrack didn't have windows, but there was a three-inch opening between the bunk and the ceiling. I looked out at the camp; I could hear little children crying. I saw a truck coming down the road and children were in the back of the truck. I could not believe what I was seeing; children... children... dragged from their mother's arms, from their homes, robbed of a normal childhood. Would they ever smile again? As the truck neared my barracks, two small children fell out of the truck. The truck stopped and an SS man got out of the passenger's side and went to the back of the vehicle to pick them up. I watched in horror as he picked the two toddlers up by their feet and smashed them against the truck. Their blood splattered, and their cries ceased. My fear intensified; I felt smothered...helpless. Those children who had commit-

but no sin would never cry again. I couldn't stop myself from screaming...desperately...fearfully...frantically... screaming. I realized that what the *blockelteste* said was true. My mother was dead. The woman beside of me quickly covered my mouth with her hand. 1915

"Please do not scream," she whispered. "Don't even talk. The punishment is death."

I quieted, but in my silence I called out to God.

"Where are you? Why aren't you here? Please, God, help these children." 1925

In my own childish mind, I reasoned that possibly God was in a place where He was more needed. I pondered these thoughts and decided that when He was finished helping with the more desperate situations, that He would come and help the children. Against all impossibilities, I was determined that I was not going to lose my faith, but I resolved to try not to bother God with my worries. 1930

"These evil men and women want me to forget who I am," I thought, "but they cannot take away my soul. I will always be the daughter of Moshe and Rachel. My mother and father gave me life and although I no longer have my family, my identity, my dignity, or my possessions, I will *not* give up my soul." 1940
1970 1972

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

Sabka was enduring Auschwitz. She wondered how much longer she could work and survive in these conditions. She had witnessed inconceivable atrocities. Soon to be nineteen, she felt ninety. Her skin was still fair, her eyes hazel. Her head was shaved and she had only one piece of clothing. She knew very little about why she was a prisoner or why her parents

had been killed. Daily she carried bricks across the yards of Auschwitz. Despite her weariness, her hunger, and her misery she took comfort in one small detail: Sabka had not allowed herself to cry. In the midst of this inhumanity, she still was human.

GLOOM

Psalm 28:1 "To you I call, O God my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit."

At zeil appel roll call the next morning, I was struck by the immensity of the camp. Not even the ghetto had been this wretched; never had I seen so many emaciated, hairless, pathetic women. This place called Auschwitz-Birkenau was huge; the chimneys were blazing and ashes encrusted the mud. The only sounds were the barking dogs and the yelling SS. Two SS men approached my block. After they approved the count, one of them selected some women and left. The second SS ordered me and the other women to exercise. He was passionate about push-ups. When a head did not go deeply enough into the mud, I watched in horror as he crushed that head with his boot. The prisoners could not speak – even a whisper, I had already learned, could incur the punishment of death. I could hear the trains pull up and people get off the cattle cars. Had it been only yesterday that I had thought nothing could be worse than what I had experienced on a similar cattle car?

I caught my breath in agony. "Mother...Hinda...please God, no. Don't let what the blockelteste said last night be true. My little sister did nothing for which to die." My father... Leizer...my other brothers. Could it be true? Were they truly

dead? Those awful chimneys in the distance...were they spewing the ashes of my entire family?

An electric barbed-wire fence enclosed the camp. Men and women aimlessly carried stones from one side of the camp to the other. There were no smiles, no laughter, no tears. I couldn't understand. Why did the SS want to get rid of the Jews? Why was their hatred so blind that they had combed the continent to find children...just to burn them? At thirteen, I no longer had a name. The metal needles which had pierced my arm had taken my identity and my childhood. Why...why? I was no longer a thirteen-year-old child. My childhood could not continue in this death camp.

After roll call the women were allowed to go to the latrine. There were lines for the toilet holes. I gagged at the stench, thinking I might vomit. My stomach lurched; I knew I would have to go to the bathroom before my turn, but that was suitable to me because I knew what I was going to have to do. I ran over to a corner of the latrine, the pain in my bowels intensifying. When I was finished, I retched as I felt through my own excrement to find ...one, two, three....finally four diamonds. I tore the end of my garment just a little and tied them into a small knot, keeping my hands curled around the small bundle. In spite of the smell, the filth, the miserable living conditions, a flicker of satisfaction burned in my soul. I still carried my mother's diamonds, which to me were a symbol of my mother's love and sacrifice. With desperate effort, I had to swallow and retrieve these diamonds again and again the entire time I was incarcerated.

The kapo screamed at us to line up. There was to be another selection. She reminded the captives that we had to be obedient, that she had supreme authority over life and death. I thought, "That kapo has made a pact with the devil."

I watched her, carrying a whip, pacing back and forth in front of us. Occasionally the whip would strike out at a prisoner. If the hostage cried, the kapo would double the thrashing. Rapidly, we were learning to endure in silence. The two who had been in charge of the exercise during the morning roll call approached us. I heard the kapo speak their names, Mengele and Toub. Mengele seemed to be some sort of doctor. I thought, "What if they discover my diamonds rolled in the hem of this garment?" I quickly placed them in my mouth and swallowed again.

Dr. Mengele was in charge of this selection process. Although I didn't know it at the time, I now realize that Dr. Mengele was the Angel of Death. I was getting ready to become one of his "experiments." I did not think of him as a doctor or a healer, but as my torturer. At times he would hum classical music with a smile of compassion and a pleasant expression on his face, but his hatred knew no boundaries. He loved selections. He always wore a crisp clean uniform, white gloves, and shiny polished boots. Mengele was more than a doctor "gone wrong"; he was a murderous doctor. He behaved more like a monster than a physician. Ironically, he never thought that he was doing anything wrong. He allowed himself to use humans as guinea pigs, then he, without feeling remorse or shame, would send them to their death. Often, he manipulated me into thinking he could be kind; it was hard to think of the bad things he did. He smiled at me during my time with him and asked me my name. I answered, "61397," but he would ask repeatedly and I eventually realized he wanted my real name, "Chana." When I finally told him my real name, he looked at me again, and his face was savage. I am very lucky that I escaped death from this madman.

I had no idea why, but the doctor selected about one hundred of us from my barrack and I was one of them. We were marched five in a row and lined up between two barracks. Other SS men approached us with Dr. Mengele. We all had to take off our one article of clothing. We stood naked and the SS kept staring at us. Having no clothes on our bodies was irrelevant; we felt no nakedness. It was our souls that were exposed, invaded and humiliated. As we marched around in a circle, the SS men stood in the center of the circle. I winced as the SS touched my body with his gloved hands. Many of us were chosen from the circle for closer examination. The group was finally narrowed to fifteen and sent to take a shower. I was one of these fifteen women. Each of us was issued a striped dress. On the back of the dress the letters *KL Katzes Lager*, concentration camp, were painted in white paint.

Again I found myself marching to a train. We traveled to a place called Majdanek. At the station, we disembarked from the train and were herded through the streets of the city to the camp. SS guards yelled and dogs snarled as I hustled to my unknown destiny. I was careful never to look into the eyes of anyone, but I glimpsed people walking by us as I hurried with the other women. The people in the city were beautifully dressed, but I could see revulsion, loathing, and disgust on their faces. Again I thought, "Why? What have I done? The only difference in me is that I am Jewish...I committed no crime...I have no hatred for you...I have always been a good girl. Why is this happening to me?" My mind screamed, my body moaned, yet my lips were silent.

The camp in Majdanek was, if anything, worse than Auschwitz-Birkenau. Almost everyone had dysentery, but they were afraid to ask for help because of the fear they would be gassed. I shared one *Koye* (bunk) with ten other women. The

condition in the latrine was unbelievably dirty, but most of us could not make it to the holes. Once again, in the latrine, I found my mother's diamonds and salvaged them. The entire time I was incarcerated, I would swallow and retrieve my mother's diamonds again and again. It would have been much easier for me to throw the diamonds away, for I realized that I would not be able to buy bread, not even for diamonds. Yet, the love and the strength that those diamonds carried were stronger than the Nazi hatred, and I was determined that I would keep them. I saw hatred so strong when Mengele experimented on me and though my pain was unbearable, I saw joy when he watched me suffer. That kind of hatred existed in the twentieth century in Nazi Germany. When the SS packed the gas chambers with mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and grandparents, I was there.

The *Koye* in Majdenek was filled with feces, blood, and misery. I had no idea what the SS planned for me, but I knew I could not survive very long in this place. Each hour was torture...waiting...waiting. For what? So many questions filled my mind. I heard whispers of lampshades...of beautiful skin. The rumor was that a lady named Ilsa Koch was choosing women with beautiful skin...to use their skin to make lampshades. Lampshades! I would have never believed the prospect, but now...after what I had seen in the past two months... anything was possible.

After forty-eight immeasurable hours, I was one of another fifteen girls chosen in a selection. Panic welling in the pit of my abdomen, I followed the guard with the other girls. I observed their unblemished skin. Could it be true that I was to become a lampshade? We began a journey back through the town. We were ordered onto the train again and the train began to move. Wet and cold, we huddled together to try to

stay warm. Even in the gloomy, smelly boxcar, I couldn't help but notice the beauty of the girl sitting next to me. The girl's head was shaved, but her skin was flawless and her eyes were a lovely hazel, just like mine. I was petite, and this girl was a full head taller, and although she was thin, there was a regal aura about her. I was fascinated with the girl and wondered if she, too, had lost her family. I admired the strength she exuded.

When the train came to a stop, we realized that we were back in Auschwitz-Birkenau. We were immediately ushered into the barrack. At the next *zeil appel* Dr. Mengele chose me and four other girls and ordered us to go to the infirmary. There he put painful chemical injections in our eyes. At first I thought I was blind. A nurse led us down steps into what seemed to be a very wet and cold prison cell. We stood shivering in this dungeon with water up to our ankles. We were afraid to speak, but we were in agony from the burning in our eyes. After what seemed to be an eternity, the girl I had thought was so striking on the train spoke to me. Although I was unable to see her, I knew who she was because of her height.

"What is your name," she whispered.

"Chana," I whispered back.

"We need to drink some of this water to keep our strength. Let's shift our bodies so that we can take turns stooping down to get a sip."

"No," I replied. "We must not drink this water. It might make us sick."

"If we drink the water, it may make us sick," the girl agreed. "But if we don't drink, we will die."

The other three girls and I pressed tightly together so the tall girl could stoop down to get a mouthful of water. As she stood back up, I also hunched down, cupping my hands to get a drink. The other three girls did the same.

Later, much later, I said as quietly as possible, "We need to get another drink. I'm going to have to go to the bathroom and there's nowhere else to go. Let's drink first."

There was an audible sigh of relief from all five girls standing in the dark in that pit of despair. Silently, we all drank and then relieved ourselves. I couldn't remember ever being so tired. "How can we sleep standing?" I thought to myself.

"Lean on me," whispered the tall girl beside me. How had the girl known my thoughts?

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Sabka," was her soft reply.

I leaned my head against Sabka's arm and slept.

For the next four days, we remained in the wet, cold chamber. Eventually, it was no longer important that the water we were drinking contained our own waste matter. Five bodies fused as one as we supported each other. Nothing mattered. So tired, so hungry...had the entire world forgotten us? "Am I blind or is this what death looks like?" I thought as I opened my eyes and tried to focus on something - anything.

Hours...days...nights...how much time had passed, I didn't know. Fatigue and hunger combined with fear of never being freed from the dark, wet dungeon. "I've been abandoned," I thought. "No one knows where I am; no one knows if I'm alive."

"I am here," murmured Sabka. "We mustn't give up."

I sensed a small seed of hope in my breast. "I have a friend," I realized. "My family is gone; no one knows I'm alive here, but this tall, beautiful girl says I must not give up. I wonder if she has lost her family also."

We waited interminably....finally I heard the door open and someone shout "Herous. Out." At first I did not think the order was meant for me; then I tried to look toward the sound

I had heard. Initially I thought I was blind, but then I understood that my eyes were trying to adjust to light after days of darkness.

Dr. Mengele examined all our eyes. He seemed disappointed, but I didn't understand his dissatisfaction. Sabka and I were able to see, but the other three girls were blind.

"Perhaps he is upset that the other girls have lost their eyesight," I thought. I quickly pushed that idea aside. Dr. Mengele is sending them to the gas chambers. He could have done that without giving the injections. What was he trying to accomplish?"

Our eyes still stinging from the light, Sabka and I watched the girls being ushered into the long, low building that we now recognized as the gas chamber.

"Shima, Israel. Remember me," cried the girls.

"I will never forget you," I promised them silently. "If I survive this nightmare, I will be your voice. I will carry your message to the world so humankind will remember you and man will not let hatred kill again. I will tell the world that you were murdered."

I realized that I was alive in a strange time and in a bizarre place. I felt that I could age ten years in one hour or die in a second at the whim of an SS man. The will to live became stronger and more important at that moment to me.

Sabka and I were led back to the barracks. The *blockelteste*, the head of my barrack commanded, "Let me see your eyes."

Sabka and I lifted our eyes to hers.

"I guess the experiment failed," she said. "Both of you still have hazel eyes - not blue like the doctor had hoped."

We did not speak of our trip away from Lager C. I was grateful for my "silent" friend. Both of us realized that no one could be aware of our friendship. Though we spoke no words,

volumes were shared with our eyes....those eyes which still could see...the darkness.

ASSESSMENTS

Job 16:7 – 8 "Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household.

You have bound me – and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me."

Time was insignificant. No clocks, no calendars... only the bleak, monotony of survival. It was spring in Auschwitz, and I tried to recall the splendor of the season, but in the muddy, bloody place that was now my home, no flowers bloomed ... no birds chirped. For me, Sabka, and thousands of other women, this spring was not a time of love and hope; it was a period of murder, torture, and ashes. Although I wanted to help, I was helpless. Even when I felt like I wanted to die, I knew I couldn't die. Spring in Auschwitz-Birkenau? Would spring ever truly come to Auschwitz-Birkenau?

Sabka and I gained some strength back after our days in the dark, damp dungeon. Thin soup wasn't much for nourishment, but it was better than the rancid water we had shared in the dungeon. Each day we carried rocks from one pile to another and back. I began to feel like an old-timer in Lager C. I became inured to the pain, the cold, the hunger, and the heavy labor. As difficult as my situation, I felt favorable about two things in my life – my silent friend and my mother's diamonds.

I had come close to losing my mother's diamonds shortly after the eye experiment. In the latrine, an SS had spotted me over in the corner. The SS detected me running my fingers through my own feces. I barely had time to grasp all of my precious stones before the SS kicked me and pulled me up by the collar. The SS screamed "Look at her. She is a nasty Jew. She belongs in the toilet. Throw her into the hole." 2328

My fellow inmates had no choice but to do as they were instructed. The women took their time and as soon as the SS was out of sight, they released me and I ran back to my barracks. Determined never to take another chance, I tried to keep the diamonds in the hem of my garment, tied into a loose piece of the fabric. At each selection, I swallowed. 2330

The SS shouted at the prisoners daily, "Three months.... after three months, no one will have a chance for survival." 2340

"If I do survive this place, this hell," I considered, "I will tell the world of these atrocities. If I had a pencil or a piece of paper, I could write to the children in the free world, my dreams, my hopes, and my fears. The wind would carry it to them, so they would remember me... and also the children in the world behind barbed-wire, in flames and mud where they have died." 2340

The SS sneered at me as if reading my thoughts. "If any of you do manage to stay alive, no one will believe you if you tell them of this." 2410

These words terrified me, for I feared no one would believe me. Nevertheless, I did think about a future. Someday I hoped that I could rebuild my family, that I could carry my mother's diamonds to a peaceful place...to a land where I would not be judged....just because I was Jewish.

I found myself marked for another experiment. Sabka also was taken for the new assessment. We apprehensively glanced

at each other as we entered the infirmary. There he was again Dr. Mengele. We were trembling, but there was no escape. A nurse ordered us to climb up on cold, rusty tables. Sabka and I moved quickly onto the tables and the nurse strapped us down.

Dr. Mengele took my right hand and examined it. I watched him pick up a syringe with a long needle. 2420

"Oh, no," I thought. "What is he going to do to me?"

Dr. Mengele positioned the needle under my fingernail of my ring finger on my right hand. As Mengele plunged the hypodermic under my nail, the pain was unbearable.

The infirmary dimmed and mercifully, I fainted.

When I regained consciousness, my finger throbbed. "What next?" I pondered.

Hearing a low moan, I turned my head slightly and saw Sabka strapped on a table next to me. I assumed my friend had undergone the same medical experiment. I tried to move my finger to get some relief from the pain, but no matter what I did, the throbbing persisted.

Soon the SS came to the infirmary and we weakly obeyed their orders to get off of the tables and to go back to the barracks. Sabka and I did not even look at one another as we walked back to our block. I wanted to speak to my friend - yet I knew better. Although we suffered, our friendship was helping sustain us. We took no chances of anyone finding out about our amity.

We stayed in the barracks for three days. On the morning of the fourth day, we were taken back to the infirmary. Again the nurse strapped us on the corroded tables. She took a vial of blood from each one of our arms. 2430

"I wonder what type of experimentation the doctor is doing now," I thought. I waited...waited...waited. Just as I was 2435

beginning to think that the nurse was going to loosen the straps and let me go, Dr. Mengele appeared. He was carrying a long hypodermic syringe. Holding my breath, I steeled myself for the inevitable. As Mengele took my right hand, I caught a glimpse of his eyes. In them I saw strong hatred, and yet joy. He gazed upon me with sadistic pleasure, watching my suffering. Yes, that kind of hatred existed in the twentieth century in Nazi Germany. This time I knew what was coming. As the needle went under my nail, I welcomed the darkness that came with the pain.

Again I woke to Sabka's low moaning. I waited for the nurse to take the straps from my body, and I willed myself to be strong. Although I presumed that I would endure more torture, I was determined to fight to stay alive. I thought of my friend....of my mother's diamonds. "No, I can not buy bread with your diamonds, Mother," I thought, "but as long as I am alive, they will stay with me. Your love for me is stronger than any abomination of Dr. Mengele. Your diamonds, dear Mother, will not nurture my body, but they will nourish my soul. I will keep my soul." 2490 2460 2482

Soon a *blockova*, the *blockelstete's* helper, came to escort us back to the barracks. I was shivering as I edged my way into my bunk that evening. 2489

"You are burning up with fever," whispered the woman next to me. "What have they done to you?" 2494

I could not answer. I was so cold, my entire arm throbbed, and I was unable to sleep. During the night, I saw a beam of light shine through the opening between the ceiling and the wall. I excruciatingly moved my body to a position where I could hold my hand up to try to see it in the tiny ray of light. What I saw alarmed me. My finger was red and swollen, but what troubled me most was the red line that ran up my arm

from the injection site. I vaguely remembered my third grade teacher teaching me what to do before I reached a doctor in case of snake bite. The teacher had instructed me that a red line going from the bite meant that the infection was spreading into the rest of the body. "I know I haven't had a snake bite," I realized, "but I think I have blood poisoning. My teacher described this. I must try to do what she told me." 2500 2510 2562

I tore a strip of cloth from my garment and tied it tightly around my arm above my elbow. I inched my way out of the bunk and onto the floor of the barracks. I knew that if I was discovered, I would be killed. Asking for a doctor would entail a sentence to the gas chambers. Slowly I wormed my way out of the barracks and dug my hand down into the cool mud. I lay there until almost daybreak. Sometime during the night, my fever broke. Before dawn, I stealthily crept back into my bunk.

At *zeil appel* the next morning, my hand still throbbed and my finger was still red and swollen, but the red line was smaller. I curled my fingers and hand up under my wrist as much as possible as I stood for roll call. When I looked carefully at my finger, I thought it looked like a pretzel. I thought about Sabka. Quickly glancing down the row, I spotted my friend. "Sabka is sick," I thought. "Whatever they are injecting under our nails is making us very ill." 2565 2577

After roll call we went back to the barracks; I knew that Sabka was suffering. I tried to look to see if her arm was red, but I couldn't tell. Sabka could barely get back into the bunk. She was holding her arms to her chest and gasping for breath. I acted on impulse. I darted out of the barracks, taking my soup bowl to try to find water for Sabka.

The kapo saw my actions and grabbed me and pushed me toward the Gestapo commando barrack.

"She has committed sabotage," the kapo reported.

"What has she done?" asked the SS in command.

"She was trying to steal water," replied the kapo.

I knew it was futile to protest. I thought I would probably be sent to the gas chamber immediately.

"Punish her," said the SS. "She will learn not to disobey."

The kapo took me behind the SS commando barrack, close to the electric barbed-wire fence. She told me to stretch out both of my arms and to place my palms facing upwards. I obeyed her.

The kapo placed a brick in both of my hands. "Stay," she commanded. "If you move from this spot, you will be electrocuted by the fence."

At first I didn't think the punishment was so bad. As the minutes grew into hour after hour, my arms ached for a reprieve. I realized I was being watched and if I lowered my arms, I would be shot. Only five feet from the fence, I knew if I stumbled I would be electrocuted.

It was the first time I had been close enough to the fence to see beyond. I could see in all directions...Mengele's platform, the gas chambers, the crematory. Everything was pointless. The work group carried stones from one site to the other aimlessly. For the first time, the camp's immense proportion struck me. "How many people are housed here?" I questioned myself.

To try to take my mind off the pain, I watched the trains coming in and the people unloading from the trains. I saw the trains at the ramp bringing in Jews. In my mind I thought they were coming from Hungary or from the Lodz ghetto. I remembered the SS men shooting under the dazzling lights, the prisoner commandos, under the commands of the SS,

striking whips and driving the men, women, and children out of the cattle cars. The dead children picked up by their legs, like slaughtered chickens, two in one hand with their hands down. Mothers screamed with desperation in two languages, Polish and Hungarian. Mengele and other doctors were selecting guinea pigs for experiments - experiments which should have been performed on animals were now being performed on humans. I had seen it in the Krankenhaus (infirmary). The sweet and musty smell that lay in the camp was even stronger where I stood. I could see the flames from the pits where children and adults were being dumped alive to die by the fire. I knew that these fires were being fueled by human fat. One of the inmates had told me about the human fat earlier.

As the passengers departed the wretched cattle cars, I noticed a mother and her little girl. The child reminded me of my little sister, Hinda. The mother bent down and spoke to the child and the little girl nodded and smiled up at her mother, all the while hugging her toy animal.

"I haven't been here long," I reflected, "but it seems like a lifetime."

I surveyed the little girl and her mother go through the selection process and watched them begin their journey toward death together. Though the pair didn't know what lay before them, I did. I distinguished the child's long hair, the mother's handsome coat. Watching them stroll toward the gas chamber, I thought of my own mother and brothers and sister. In the brief eternity of Auschwitz-Birkenau, simple pleasures had been forgotten. Clothing, beds, hair, laughter.....would these ever return to my life?

"How many children's voices have been silenced in this unspeakable terror?" I said aloud.

The bricks didn't seem quite as heavy. Though my arms were burning and my muscles were in agony, I resolved once again to survive, "I must live as long as I can...for the children. I promise to be their voice if I survive this nightmare." At that moment, my survival became more important. I knew that I must endure all pain and live for them as long as I could.

After twelve hours, the kapo finally came to take me back to her barracks. I hadn't had a drink or anything to eat at all that day. I prepared to climb into my bunk, and I heard someone whisper, "Chana." It was Sabka.

"I've been so worried," Sabka murmured. "I saved this for you from my ration. Eat every crumb of it."

In her hand, she held a dried crust of bread. I embraced my friend and Sabka spoke softly, "It is over. You made it."

"If only it truly were over," I considered. "I may be thirteen years old, but I am no longer a child. My childhood cannot continue here. Swallowing my mother's diamonds will no longer be painful for me. Those diamonds will be my link...my link to my family I have already lost and to my dream...of a future family which I hope I will build someday....beyond the incomprehensible nightmare of this place called Auschwitz-Birkenau."

This resolve stayed with me for the next few weeks. Every three days for two weeks, the injections continued. Never again did Sabka or I become ill from the experiments. Though our bodies were weak and frail, our resolve to live was as tough as diamonds.

GLIMMER

Psalm 112:4 "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man."

Days remained a blur. Most of them were spent carrying bricks. One morning after roll call, I was selected to go to a different job. I didn't know exactly what I would be doing or where I was going, but I found myself in line with the other women. I left Sabka carrying bricks and hoped that we would not be separated.

The other women and I were directed into a huge warehouse. An incredible sight awaited inside the building. Thousands of workers sorted through suitcases, unpacking and classifying. An assembly line sifted through the contents and separated all the items. I didn't know what to think, but I was appalled.

"I cannot go through someone else's belongings," was my first thought.

"Poor Jews," I reflected, "from all the four corners of Europe. They have brought crockery, food, fountain pens, photos of children, shoes, clothes ...and baby blankets."

I quickly began to open suitcases as the other workers were doing. My mind immediately turned to my mother. "Mother, I see dresses that look like yours. The photos assembled are people just like our family. The baby blankets are such a sorrow. They held hope and joy...and a dead life. They can

only be reborn if I live...through memories. It is not fair that your dresses, mother, and my siblings' books are here and you are not. Oh, was our life so meaningless?" 2790 2800 2817

Then I heard voices no yelling... no screaming, but the normal sounds of people conversing. I thought, "Why are they speaking? The punishment is death." 2820 2825

"Has it been so long since I heard the sound of my own voice?" I wondered. 2830

Soon the kapo gave me a job; I was to fold the baby blankets and package them to be sent to Germany. I could speak to the women working around me. 2839

"What is this factory called?" I asked.

"It is called *Kanada*," came the reply. 2846

"Like the country?" I questioned.

"Yes, like the country. We call it *Kanada* because of the abundance of everything here. The country *Kanada* is very prosperous, you know." 2849

"But what good could come of these things? These all belonged to someone else and we are packing them to be shipped to Germany. This certainly isn't *our Kanada*," I said. 2848

"Shhh. Keep your voice down. There are ways to get these things back to the barracks to help others. We just have to be careful," replied the woman. 2850

I answered, "If we are discovered committing sabotage, we will be killed." 2933 2940

"Well, we are very fortunate right now," said the woman.

"The kapo in our barrack is kind. Although she has to report us if we are caught, she often looks the other way. Watch her closely. She will find a way to let us know if we are going to be carefully searched when we leave. We probably won't get to work here for a very long time. Prisoners are switched out from this job regularly." 3006

That entire day, I pondered the woman's words. I couldn't help but think of the children who had been swaddled in the blankets I was folding. It was incomprehensible that those blankets would be sent to Germany – to the enemy. I thought of Leizer, of his birth, of the first time I had held him in my arms. How long ago it seemed! I remembered his circumcision and the joy my family had experienced that day. My heart ached as I recalled the promise I had made to be a good sister to him. How I missed my little sister and brothers – Mendel, Mayer, and David! I tried to ease my sorrow by thinking of happy times with them. Seeing familiar family items reminded me so much of my own family.

That night, I could scarcely sleep thinking of my good fortune. The next morning, I went to *zeil appel* barefoot. 3010

"Where are your shoes?" whispered a fellow prisoner. 3020

"I'm going to *Kanada*," I replied. "I will be able to wear a pair back when I return to the barracks tonight." 3030

I was rewarded with a rare conspiratorial smile.

For a few days, I was able to smuggle several items for my fellow inmates, but the kapo warned us one morning that we would be carefully searched when we returned that night.

"Do not bring anything with you at all. You are all aware of the consequences," she screamed. 3040

Sabka was so hungry, and I had planned to bring her a small loaf of bread that day. I thought to myself, "Poor Sabka. I won't be able to bring her the bread." 3055

That afternoon all of the women lined up to return to the barracks. The prisoner in front of me had not heeded the words of the kapo. An SS was vigilantly eyeing us as we departed *Kanada* to return to our barracks. I was fearful for the woman ahead of me because I knew she had layers of items

under her clothing. Suddenly, the kapo in charge of our barracks jumped in front of the woman.

"What are you doing?" she shouted. "You know you aren't supposed to remove any of the items from the warehouse." The kapo continued to scream at the woman all the way into the barracks. The SS kept staring at the other women leaving the storehouse, assuming that the kapo had taken care of the thief.

One of a few miracles.....

As the older woman predicted, I was only able to work in *Kanada* for a short period of time. I realized I had been granted a reprieve from the grueling daily task of manual labor, but somehow, folding baby blankets had been more difficult. The entire time I worked in the warehouse, I felt as if I had been attending a mass funeral for children who would never laugh, play, or experience the joys of childhood. Though I didn't know the children who had been kept warm by those blankets, I could smell their infant smells and imagine their mothers cuddling them and comforting them. Those children had been innocent. It was difficult for me to think about packing their coverlets and afghans, many handmade, to send to Germany.

"In Germany, the children are innocent, too," I realized. Though this epiphany was difficult for me to accept, I knew that in order to stay focused on survival I couldn't allow myself to become like my captors. I thought of the fathers, the mothers, the children – the bravest victims of hatred because their eyes were not blue enough or their skin not white enough or because they were Jewish. What grief and sadness they had left behind. How useful those sufferers might have been! An entire great generation – never to be able to take part in the world just because of who they were.

"I must never hate anyone," I thought. "Children cannot choose their race, color, or nationality. That is what is wrong with this place ... this Auschwitz ... this Birkenau. I have seen the hatred: the detestation on the face of Mengele, the disgusted expressions on the people outside the fence in the ghetto, the loathing in the eyes of the SS. Why? Why do these people hate me...abhor innocent children? Is it because their skin is too dark...their eyes are not blue...or because they are Jewish? Ridiculous. Somehow, some way, the world must find out what is happening here so that this can never happen again."

And the muddle of time continued.

At roll call one morning, Sabka and I were once again chosen for another of Mengele's inhumane experiments. We were taken to the infirmary, but this was a different infirmary, the *Krankenhaus*.

I shivered from fear and cold. "I hope I am not going to receive another injection under my nail with no anesthesia," I thought.

But we were ordered to march - Sabka, myself, and about twenty other women. We passed many camps beyond barbed-wire fences with emaciated inmates on the inside of the fences, and tall watchtowers with SS and guns in the towers on the outside of the fences. Finally we saw an iron gate, crowded by huge black letters, "ARBEIT MACHT FREI." We were in Auschwitz. The view of the cattle trains, the dogs barking, the fear..."Are they going to send us to Ilsa Koch again," I wondered. But no...we were sent to the infirmary.

Sabka and I were strapped tightly onto rusty, metal tables. While we were being prepared for the experiment, I saw many people passing through the infirmary and they never returned.

"I need to find out what is happening to those people," I thought. 3178

I saw Mengele come in with six young SS men and women. Across from us, they entered the little room and left the door open. I watched Mengele with these young SS doctors, and he appeared to be teaching them about his work. Mengele was showing them glass jars containing deformed body parts - elbows...arms...heads....hands...even faces. One of the young SS asked Mengele, "What do you intend to do with these?" 3178

"We are sending these to the museum in Berlin," Mengele explained. "After the war is over the people in the Third Reich will ask what we have done with the Jews. We will be able to show this to them and explain that we had to kill them. We must make sure that no ancestors have Jewish features." 3185

As the nurse stood nearby, Mengele approached the tables and began studying my arm. The number 61397 was bright in the glare of the infirmary lights. Mengele seemed to be thinking as he examined my tattoo closely. "I will find a way," he remarked to the others, "to remove this evidence." 3190

The others doctors listened to him closely. 3201

Mengele continued, "I must find a way to remove the tattoos from the SS. All the SS have been ordered to get a tattoo signifying their membership and the blood type - so we will know their blood is pure. We will use the prisoners to test different methods for deletion of their numbers because the ink the SS used for their tattoos is the same as the prisoners." 3221

I had never heard of such a thing. I did not know of any other prisoner who had been subject to such an experiment. Mengele and the nurse left me and Sabka alone in the room. 3267

"We will never survive this one," I said. 3273

"We must and we will," Sabka whispered. "Just be strong and do not let them take your soul. Do not lose your spirit." 3294

When Mengele returned, he smiled reassuringly at me. He used his wonderful smile to hide his hatred he had for the prisoners. He made me feel like I could trust him and that he would not hurt me again. For a moment I didn't fear him, but then I remembered all the other things he had done; an incident where he was smiling and toying with a little gypsy child and then killed him just as the child began to show his love for him. I had seen him walk with this child everywhere, the child hanging on his leg. Mengele had taken the child with him, playing with him, holding him at *zeil appel*, letting him stay in the infirmary with him. Then Mengele murdered this little gypsy boy.

Images of the syringe going under my nail filled my mind. I was repulsed by his smile. Mengele began his experiment. I tried to suppress my screams so Sabka would not have to suffer with me. I knew that soon Sabka would endure her own pain. With no anesthetic, it didn't take long for me to drift into unconsciousness. For what seemed like days, I hovered between worlds of deep darkness or agonizing raw pain. I had no idea what Mengele was doing to my arm, but it felt like he was pulling the sinew through my skin. Muscle and tissue and flesh all were drawn up into a huge syringe. The pain....never again.... the pain. I flowed between shadows and light. Was I dreaming or was it really Dr. Mengele who said, "I think we got it all." 3300

Finally, I awakened. My arm was red, bloody, and throbbing. Sabka, my dear friend, was in the same condition I was. We both moaned in our suffering. Dr. Mengele was coming toward us. I was determined to remain conscious to hear his instructions to the nurse. His glare was spiteful and his words venomous, "Give them the injection." His emphasis was on the word *the*. "I mean the lethal one," he continued. 3309

The nurse came over to both of our tables and gave us an injection and the doctor, seemingly satisfied, left the infirmary. As soon as he disappeared, the nurse loosened the straps on our tables.

3310

"Hurry," she commanded.

Sabka and I had no idea what was happening. Both of us were weak from hunger and pain. The nurse steered us into a room full of sick patients.

3315

"You must be strong," she instructed the two of us. "This is the tuberculosis room. Mengele will not come in here. It is too contagious. Wait here quietly until I return."

3335

The tuberculosis room was unbelievable. Sick people were crying, begging, praying for help. We were incredibly weak. We curled up in a corner and held on to each other. We tried to detach ourselves as much as we could from all we saw going on around us. These people did not look like people anymore...still they fought to survive and we whispered to each other, "We must live." Finally, the nurse returned.

3338

"Do not talk about the experiment," the nurse instructed. "Forget the numbers that you had on your arms. If you remember them or you are discovered, you will certainly be gassed and I will be, too."

3371

The nurse handed each of us a striped dress with a number sewn on the left shoulder. "This will be your number now," she directed. "You must fail to remember the number that was under your skin and you must never talk about what happened here today," she admonished.

3399

She ushered us out into the darkness and led us to a barracks where we had never been before. When she assigned us to our new bunks, she reminded us, "Never talk about what happened to you in the infirmary. Never speak of me. I work

for the underground. If I am discovered, I will be gassed, and many more prisoners will be killed because of it."

3436

I could not believe it. I had survived another unspeakable act of the Nazi's hatred. Sabka and I had prevailed over Dr. Mengele. I had hovered between the gloom of death and the warmth of life. Miraculously, a sparkle of hope had been delivered to me... a glimmer of possibilities. The underground nurse offered a streak of brilliant white on the shadowy canvas of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

MARVEL

Lamentations 5: 14 – 15 "The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music. Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning."

Yom Kippur in Auschwitz – what a façade! I was aware that Yom Kippur was near and all of the women prisoners knew that somehow we must fast for the holiday, but what a dilemma! The hunger pains were intense, but the Jewish holiday and traditional fasting were instilled in every fiber of our pitiful prisoners' skeletal bodies. Pinching our cheeks to try to look healthy, all of us trudged to roll call the morning before the holiday. We knew that we must fast for twenty-four hours, so we decided to take the evening's meal, which usually came in late afternoon before the evening roll call, and to eat it and then we would be able to fast. Unfortunately, the guards deduced what we had planned and on that day the soup came after sundown and we couldn't eat it. We poured the soup into the dirt, and we fasted. Because of our actions, my fellow inmates and I had nothing to eat at all for five days following Yom Kippur; this was our punishment for fasting. I will never forget those five awful days. I never want to see another human die of hunger.

One terrible day slipped into another. Only the new horrors created by my torturers kept agony from becoming routine. My face was gray and hollow despite my attempt to pinch

my cheeks so Dr. Mengele would not find me sickly looking. I completely gave up fighting the lice and the sores on my body. Washing...what a beautiful memory of the world the Nazi's had taken away from me. I was constantly thirsty. The drugs in the soup were intended to destroy my reproductive organs, and malnutrition caused my stomach to painfully swell. I was so weak I could hardly walk, yet when I was ordered to stand, I did.

I wasn't even aware that Simchas Torah was imminent until the SS announced that it was time for the Jews' happy holiday. The guards ordered the women to roll call that morning, and it lasted from dawn until mid-morning. The Hungarian Jewish women stood patiently with the hot ashes falling on their feet. The weather was freezing, but the SS commanded the women to sit on the cold ground.

"Never has my spirit been this low," I thought to myself as I watched the ash sifting softly like gray snow from the six burning chimneys around me.

"We are going to give you a gift on this happy holiday," announced one of the SS. "We have arranged for a concert today."

I gazed around me at the surreal setting. The smiling SS women and men were dressed in crispy clean uniforms. Relaxing on comfortable chairs in the front on a platform, looking beautiful with lipstick and even smelling of perfume, sat the malevolent SS women. In front of these well-dressed oppressors, one thousand walking corpses assembled, waiting quietly for their "celebration concert."

A group of prisoners dressed in stripes came marching out in rows of five, each carrying a different musical instrument. They took their places standing, and they played from mid-morning until dark. These instrumentalists played excit-

ing, sexy melodies, music that spoke to the body, but not the soul. All the while, the six crematories turned living flesh into gray ashes. The flames blazed brighter than the sun, although the heavy smoke darkened the day long before dusk. Tears rolled down the faces of my fellow prisoners. We sat with the hot ash falling around us, defeated and in despair.

"What a farce!" I thought. "Look at the SS laughing. Will any of us wear lipstick, perfume, or clean clothes again? Will we ever feel human again?"

As I looked at the chimneys spitting human ash, I remembered my first day in this evil place. The smoke was making my eyes smart and burning my lungs. The inmates had told me on my first day that the smoke was from the burning bodies. I realized that I didn't need to hear that now - I could see it...I could smell it, touch it. I thought, "Dear God, this cannot be. I cannot believe it." I didn't believe it.

But I did bear the torment of Simchas Torah; I still lived. My human spirit had sunk to the greatest depths, but I still existed and kept my faith in God and in life.

An excited SS man drove into camp on a motorcycle on a rainy day in 1944. He exchanged words with the barrack leaders and began yelling, "Herein, herein! Inside, inside!"

As I was running to my barrack, I fell and couldn't get up. I felt that I was dying...that this was going to be my last day. I was grateful...I was tired of struggling to live. Then I thought, "What could they want from me before they kill me? They have taken my name. They have murdered my family. They have seized my possessions. They have destroyed my identity. They have demolished my pride." I felt something happening to me. A force of strength came over my body and I again vowed not to give them my soul because that was all I had left.

I got up out of the mud, and I promised myself that I would never sink this low again. I began again to fight for survival.

My fellow inmates and I hurried inside and were put under a strict curfew – Birkenau was burning. Someone had started a revolt. I waited nervously for something to happen...for some sort of news...perhaps good news. Late that day I received a double food ration, and I became even more frightened.

"We never receive this much food – only our thin soup," I thought. "What can this mean?" 3549

Sleep eluded me that night, and the next day I learned that three teenage girls had helped begin a revolt by bringing ammunition powder to the Sondercommando to burn one of the crematories down. The Sondercommando was a group of strong young men and boys selected from different parts of Europe when they arrived in the camps. Their job was to appease the people as they led them to the gas chamber from the trains so there would be no panic or chaos. The Sondercommando were commanded to reassure the prisoners as they were going to the gas chambers. These young men were forced to tell the prisoners that they were going to the shower; they even showed them the coat hangars to put their clothes on while they were in the "shower." After the gassing, the Sondercommandos had to take the bodies to the crematories and burn the bodies. All of these tasks were against their own will, but at the orders of the SS. In addition, the Sondercommandos knew that they only had three or four months to live. After that time, the Nazis would choose new Sondercommando workers so that there would be no living bearers. The Sondercommandos' revolt had failed; the other crematories took up the slack. The Sondercommandos were caught and killed. Late that evening, I was forced to march out to the gallows and to watch as the three girls were hanged.

I admired the girls' courageous acts and determination, but I was weak...tired. I had to fight daily not to lose touch with reality, knowing that if I did, the penalty would be death. Hiding my friendship with Sabka was a welcomed adversity, but I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach that something was about to happen.

Although Sabka and I were no longer involved in any medical experiments, occasionally we were called into the infirmary for blood tests. One blustery day we were waiting in the infirmary, and I was seized by the urge to look through the door toward the back of the infirmary. It had been the exit for many prisoners when Sabka and I were undergoing medical experiments. Neither of us had ever seen anyone return through those doors. Tiptoeing softly, I stealthily crept to the rear of the infirmary and slowly turned the knob and peered through the crack. Sabka followed close behind me. Both of us gasped! In the next room lay scores of sick, emaciated Jews. Connected to each skeletal body were three bottles. Those barely alive people were being drained of their blood! The Nazi doctors had inserted one tube into each person's neck, one into the crook of the arm, and the other at the back of the knee. Three pints of blood were simultaneously drawn from each prisoner.

3560 "No wonder we never saw any of those prisoners come back through the infirmary," I whispered that night to Sabka. 3563
"I can't believe that Jewish blood is good enough to save the lives of German soldiers, but not good enough to let any of us live." 3589 3590

But Sabka, older and wiser, whispered in return, "That blood will never go into a German. That blood will be used to save the lives of the Poles and the friends of the Germans who

3516

are helping them. Never would a German be defiled by Jewish blood."

One morning at daybreak, roll call was lasting longer than usual. The rain splattered teardrops in the mud. It was cold when the selection began. The Gestapo chose Sabka to join a large group of women. Our eyes locked for the one last time.

"Always remember," Sabka's eyes seem to speak. "Do not lose your soul – be brave. You will survive." At the end of the day when Sabka did not return, I assumed she had been taken to the chamber of death.

I knew I could not say goodbye. I stumbled back to the barracks without my friend. So alone...so frightened...so lost. I could not speak – could not share my feelings with anyone. The hunger and the loneliness were harder to overcome now that I was alone.

My arm had not yet healed; I kept it as clean as I could with rain water. My one piece of clothing did not protect me from Poland's cold. The women in my barracks tried to hide me between the rows of five when we were ordered to line up for roll call. I was so small, so sick. I no longer worried as much about being selected for another experiment; I was concerned about being selected for the gas chamber.

Suddenly, at mid-morning the SS ordered a selection, and my number was selected along with fifteen hundred other women to leave the camp. The guards told us that we were going to work in factories, and I tried to believe them. The SS commanded us to take off our clothing and we waited patiently for the work clothes we had been promised. Abruptly, the guards ordered all of us to march.

"Going to work naked?" I questioned myself. "This cannot be real."

The SS herded us into a narrow passage. We were fifteen hundred naked women with the SS staring at us, but it didn't matter. Our bodies weren't important...it was our souls which were exposed, invaded, and humiliated.

"This is the number three gas chamber," I realized.

No sooner had the thought entered my mind when the women began screaming and pushing against the walls to escape. We realized that the chamber was not big enough to accommodate all of us. I was in the doorway when the women started pushing out and as I was being pushed out, I dug my nails into the doorway so I wouldn't get pushed back in. I hung on even though the guard pushed against me to get me in through the doorway. I heard an SS yelling in German, "Machenzi cu. Close the door."

"Close the door so we can dispense the Cyclone B," the SS again ordered the guard.

Still, I dug my nails harder into the doorway and hung on. The guard could not get the door closed. Nervously, he threw me out onto the ramp and shut the door and disappeared.

Naked, I ran up the ramp and searched for a place to hide, but I couldn't find a place. Then I saw a little space under the roof of the gas chamber, and I crawled into this little space. I heard screams...then silence. I remembered the older inmates telling me about the smoke stinging their eyes, their throats, their lungs – recalled the women explaining that the smoke was from burning bodies. In the stillness, I knew what the other inmates had told me had been true. The little children had suffered in the gas chamber; the hush verified their agony.

"Even though I know I will be gassed with the next transport," I thought, "for this moment, I am alive. I have hope."

Then marvel of marvels – a Sondercommando boy saw me. He pulled my shivering body from under the eave of the

roof and covered me with his striped jacket. He spoke to me in Hungarian, so I knew he was from my country. He quickly left.

I thought that I was hallucinating because I had never heard of anyone being saved from a gas chamber.

It seemed an eternity until he returned, but he did.

"I am going to throw you on a train that is waiting on the tracks beside this gas chamber," he told me. "There are open cars on the train. There will be women on the train going to a work camp. Become one of them!" he instructed.

"What is your name?" I asked him.

"It doesn't matter," he replied. "I have worked for almost three months as a Sondercommando. I only have a few days left to live."

I looked hard into his face so I might remember this guardian angel that had saved my life and put his own at risk.

"I don't know how to thank you," I said to him.

"If you make it," he said, "live a little for me, too." At that moment, I realized how much I wanted to live.

Before I had a chance to ask him anything else, he tossed me and I landed in a cattle car with no roof. There were other women on the train, but no one spoke to me.

The train began its journey; my mind was racing.

"How did I get so lucky?" I wondered. "There are seven gas chambers in Birkenau and only the number three had a railroad leading up to the gas chamber. If I had been taken to any other gas chamber I could not have had this miracle. Oh, Mother, God is helping me survive. I don't know why I have been spared and my family has been lost, but I still carry with me your love...your diamonds."

The train only moved at night so I couldn't see where we were or where we were going. I didn't know how long I

had been on the train. I was cold and hungry when the train stopped in the middle of the night. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was in a labor camp in Neuengamme in Germany. The train unloaded its cargo and departed empty; therefore I knew no one would leave this camp.

The other women and I were led to our barracks in the middle of the night. Even in the dark, I knew that I had been granted a reprieve. The smell of burning flesh did not permeate the night air. Ash did not cover the ground as it had in Auschwitz and Birkenau. Although my body ached from fatigue and my stomach was gnarled with hunger, I thankfully crawled into the top bunk which had been assigned to me. Someone was fast asleep on the bottom bunk.

As I lay in my bunk, I thought of the Sondercommando boy who had saved me.

"Kindness and goodness still exist in this world," I thought. "If I survive, I will make sure that I do live a little for that boy....if I survive."

At dawn, we were awakened and ordered to assemble for roll call. I forced myself to roll over and tried to drag my exhausted, starving body from the hard bunk. I heard a movement below me and peered over the edge of my bunk.

In the stillness of the morning, hazel eyes met hazel eyes. Joy.....pure joy filled my heart, my mind, my soul. Marvelous, miraculous, unbelievable...it was true. Sabka lay on the bottom bunk. Although we couldn't speak to each other, we were so grateful. The sun rose in glorious silence.

LIFE?...DEATH?...LIFE?...DEATH?

Deuteronomy 30:19 "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

Though I wasn't sure of exact dates, I knew that the winter of 1944 – 1945 was worse than any winter I had experienced during my fourteen years. Sabka and I both worked in the munitions factory during the day, but we were in separate buildings. Each of us packed ammunition to be sent to the front lines of the war. At night, we would wearily gaze at each other – sharing misery and despair – yet thankful to have in the other a silent friend. We weren't allowed to talk, but truthfully, we were too tired...too weak to even try. The thin soup and sleep, blessed sleep, was all we had to sustain us until January, 1945.

In January, 1945, we, the five thousand prisoners in Neuengamme were assembled in the bitter cold and lined up in our usual rows of five. Each prisoner was given a thin blanket, a pair of wooden shoes, and an article of clothing. Then we were ordered to march.

"Where are we marching?" I thought to myself. "We are going away from the camp. What can this mean?" 3861

Sabka and I joined the five thousand as we marched into the unknown – away from any freedom which might have

been approaching. The psychotic monster who wanted to destroy the Jewish nation had ordered all the Jews to march. The rhythm was rapid and brutal. We were determined to survive, but at this time in our struggle, our spirits were crumbling.

How long we marched each day, I did not know, but I did know that never had I been so cold. Many prisoners were shot each day and left by the wayside because they couldn't keep in step with the others. If the prisoners who had been shot didn't die immediately, they were left to suffer because the SS refused to waste another bullet. At night, Sabka and I would huddle under our thin blankets, and during the day, we would use strips from the blankets to wrap our feet. There was no food; our only sustenance was snow we walked on.

Days became weeks and weeks became months. After about two months on the death march, only about half of us were alive. During the eternity of this struggle for survival, all of us entered an empty camp. It looked very much like Birkenau except it was deserted. I saw towers at the corners, barbed-wire fences and wooden barracks. We were to spend one night in this empty camp and the silence was eerie. When we entered the camp it was almost dark. The SS allowed us to go to the latrine and then took us to the empty barracks, which had been stripped of everything, even the bunks. The SS ordered us to sleep on the floor.

"If you go outside for any reason you will be shot," the SS said.

I lay down on the floor beside Sabka and went to sleep. Something woke me during the night. I stood up next to the sleeping women. For the moment, I had almost forgotten that I was in a concentration camp. Suddenly, panic overtook me and I felt like I couldn't breathe.

3879

"I have to get out of here," I thought. "I must get some fresh air or I'm going to suffocate." 3890

I stepped over the sleeping bodies and walked out the door of the barracks. Outside I saw the four corners of the camp...the towers...the gate. I did not see anyone – the SS, the dogs; the towers were empty – unguarded.

"I'm going to go for it," I decided. "I wish Sabka was with me, but if I can make it out of here to freedom, I'll find a way to get her out." 3921

I began walking to the gate. I thought I heard a man's voice say, "Don't go any closer to that gate. Go back, my child, back to the barracks, just for a little longer, and then you will be free and safe." 3944

I looked around, startled. There was no one in sight. Who could it have been? There were no men in my group other than the SS. The SS wouldn't have spoken to me anyway; they would have shot me. I ran as fast as I could back to the barracks. Everyone was sleeping and I settled next to Sabka and fell asleep again. 3950

When I woke the next morning, I knew I had been dreaming. After roll call Sabka whispered to me, "Where did you go during the night last night?"

"I didn't go anywhere," I answered.

I whispered to Sabka about my dream. "I dreamed I was escaping." 3967

Sabka said, "That was no dream. You were gone for at least fifteen minutes during the night. We have had a miracle. When you were thinking of escaping, God sent an angel to stop you. We would have all been killed this morning if you had been missing at roll call. We must continue on with our remaining strength and dignity. I'm sure that God is with us." 3967
86
4023

Some of the prisoners died during the night and were left lying on the barracks floor. Sabka and I said the Kaddish before we left. Again we marched toward the unknown.

"I hope we aren't marching toward a gas chamber," I whispered to Sabka.

Sabka covered my mouth with her hand. "I don't want to become ashes," she replied. 4038

We walked in silence. We spotted some bombed out trucks and tanks. They were empty, but as I passed one of the trucks, I saw my reflection in the mirror. I had to look twice to make sure I was seeing correctly, and then I became frightened.

"I am ripe for the gas chamber," I thought. "I must try a little harder...push a little longer." 4040 4055

"You are right," I told Sabka. "I don't want to become ashes either. We must live!" 4068

We continued to march - our will to live much stronger than our bodies. Each day, we routinely pinched our cheeks to try to look healthy. Our hope for freedom was a flicker that would not die. We would continue to encourage each other.

One morning as I was tying the strips around my feet, I looked...really looked at the misery around me. The five thousand marchers were depleted. Although I didn't know how much longer I could keep going, I thought of my mother...of my family. 4070

"What family?" I questioned as Sabka struggled to rise. A brief smile entered my heart. "I still have my mother's diamonds...and I have Sabka. She and I will begin new families and perhaps we will grow old and share our families."

I turned to Sabka and took her arm. 4097

"March tall!" I ordered quietly. "We must begin to march to independence." 4106

That day the straggling group marched through a farm town. The SS led the little band into a barn to sleep for the night for the first time in months. Although we were glad to have shelter, we realized that the reason for the luxury was the SS themselves were so exhausted they needed rest. In the barn was a loft, and someone discovered a hole which led to the loft. Because I was the smallest, the other prisoners formed a human ladder, and I climbed their bodies and squeezed through the hole. I found hay...lots of hay, and I began to throw it over the loft so we could bury ourselves in it to remain warm for the evening. Then I found a treasure chest. Buried in the hay were some apples, turnips, and carrots. I began throwing everything down as fast as I could. The prisoners below were so hungry that they began fighting for the food. The noise became so loud that one of the SS woke and stormed into the stall to the prisoners. I was unaware of the guard's presence and kept throwing over all I could find. Suddenly, I realized that there was silence. I peered through the hole of the loft and a gun was pointing at my head.

"I am going to kill you - you dirty Jew," the guard screamed. 4115

Trembling, I eased my body through the opening and fell onto the hay below. I could hear my fellow inmates whispering prayers for me as I landed. The SS took the butt of his rifle and began to beat me. I could feel blood running down my face. I lost consciousness.

The guard threw me out into a snowdrift to die. As soon as the SS went to sleep, Sabka and several others crept out and carried me into the barn. They propped me up against the hay and covered my body with more hay. I struggled through that night. The next morning when the march began, I knew

I could not go on. I begged Sabka to leave me and allow me to die. 4170

"I will not leave you," Sabka told me. "We have made it this far. You must gather what strength you have. We must all fight to live. If you don't, if we don't, then the Germans will achieve their goal of killing all of us." 4140

"I have no strength," I told her. "I will cause someone else to be killed." 4169

"We will help you," Sabka responded. 4173

The women helped me to the middle of the row of five when they began to march. The others held me up, really carrying me in their own weak arms, until I gathered enough vigor to walk on my own.

It seemed to me that the road was getting longer and longer and the prisoners growing fewer and fewer. I looked back at the road behind me.

"There is no hope for us," I whispered to Sabka. "Look at the road behind us. Bodies litter the road." 4189

"Hush," said Sabka, putting her hand over my mouth. "God might hear you. We must live for them that are left on that road." 4204

It was April and the weather was a little warmer, but there were only a few hundred prisoners left alive. One afternoon we were marching on a narrow country road between mountains. Suddenly airplanes appeared from behind the mountains and started bombing the convoy that carried the SS supplies. Many of the SS were wounded or killed. The guards who weren't hurt left the German shepherds to guard us in order to take care of the wounded SS. As dusk fell, the SS ordered us to line up to march. I didn't want to march anymore. Near the back of the column, I sat down in the middle of the road and waited to be shot. Sabka pulled me up and we stumbled to the side of the

road. It wasn't long before the prisoners were marching...and still Sabka and I sat. The SS were shouting for the prisoners to follow their voices, but we sat on the side of that road and kept silent. In the darkness, we supported each other.

After a while, we began to whisper to one another. 4210

"Imagine the tomorrows that we are going to have. We will go to the library and read a book and then we will go home and have dinner with our families. Oh, it will be so wonderful to sleep in a bed alone, not sharing with ten people. You can not die today, Chana," Sabka whispered. 4258 4269

"Of course," I thought, "that is a wish we will never have." I still could not imagine how we could survive. Although we had survived Dr. Mengele's experiments together, I did not know how we could survive this death march. What kept us going was Sabka and I were remembering the world that the Nazis had taken away from us...to feel human.

It was as if Sabka was reading my mind. "Before you die, don't you want something special?" she whispered.

I said, "Oh, yes, I want some real food."

"I want some, too," Sabka responded. 4291

I asked, "What would you like?"

"My favorite is scrambled eggs," Sabka answered.

"I only want a small loaf of bread... never to have to share it with anyone," I said. "I don't think that will ever happen, Sabka." 4324

We suddenly realized that the column had passed. We were on a very dark road near the forest. The night was so dark we could scarcely see each other.

"God created this dark night so that we could escape," Sabka said quietly. 4334

Sabka pushed me down, and we lay quietly to make sure there was no one waiting for us to join the march. When it was

evident we were alone and no one was coming back, we sat up. It was dark and there was forest on both sides of the road.

"Where do we go?" I asked. "Which side is safe?"

"I don't know," Sabka answered. 4345

I made a fist with my hands and held them in front of me, with my thumbs pointing up to the sky. Sabka was familiar with the gesture. She did the same. We pointed with our right thumb to one side of the road and said, "Life." Then we pointed to the other side of the road with the left thumb and said, "Death." We were tired; we were hungry; we were walking skeletons; we were *not* on the death march. We were free.

"Life...death...life...death...life...death."

"LIFE!"

We entered the forest of "life."

LIBERATION

Psalm 146:7 "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry, The Lord sets prisoners free."

4347

At daybreak, we were still walking in the forest. In the distance we saw an abandoned farm. I dropped on my knees in a field and began digging in the dirt with my bare hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Sabka. "Are you crazy?"

"I'm looking for food," I answered.

"In the dirt?" questioned Sabka.

"Yes, yes," I replied, digging frantically. "My grandfather was a farmer. Vegetables grow in the ground. Perhaps I can find something from last year's harvest." 4382

Sabka sat wearily beside me. She was too tired to help - too exhausted to talk, but feebly she dug. 4388

"Look, Sabka!" I exclaimed. "I found a potato!"

We shared the potato, eating slowly....savoring every scrap. When we had finished we walked on through the field and spotted a brook. It was the cleanest water we had seen in a long time. We drank and rested. For the first time in over a year, we were rich. We had eaten a potato, drank pure water, and talked aloud. Though our bodies were weak, our friendship had sustained us, and our camaraderie was no longer silent.

For several days, we wandered through the forests, managing to stay alive, but frightened of being caught and killed.

At night, we would sleep together under the half-blanket that we had remaining. The other half, we used to wrap our feet. On the death march we had lost our shoes, and we had to wrap our feet as we walked in the snow. We talked about our experiences and wondered why God had spared our lives.

"Did you ever think about how it is that we are still alive after the experiments?" Sabka asked me. There was a strange expression on her face.

I answered, "I don't understand what you are asking." 4411

"I don't think they let the subjects from the experimental units stay alive," answered Sabka. "The Germans didn't want to leave living bearers so we could tell the world what happened if we live through this. Why were we allowed to live?" 44

As if answering herself, she continued, "I think that what happened at the last experiment is that the nurse who assisted Mengele was a part of the underground. She saved our lives when the doctor told her to give us the injection. I think she was supposed to give us an injection to kill us. Instead, she gave us an injection to put us to sleep, and then she pulled us off of the table and shoved us into the tuberculosis room. When she told us not to talk about the experiments and to never tell anyone about the numbers on our arms, she was telling us to forget the past so that we could live. She was telling us not to tell, Chana, or we would be killed. When she put us in the tuberculosis room, she felt that we would be safe. The Gestapo wouldn't go into that room because they were afraid they would catch the disease. After she was sure that the SS thought we had been killed, she issued us clothing with numbers from people who had already died. We didn't recognize anyone in the new barracks where she sent us. She didn't want anyone to recognize us. That nurse really saved our lives." 4500
4550
4515

4608

I looked at Sabka in amazement. "I had never really thought about that. Now I understand, in part, why we have not become ashes." 4616

It was dawn one morning and we were asleep under the piece of blanket, both of our heads covered. I felt something poking into my back, and I was suddenly afraid. I could tell that the object prodding me was the butt of a rifle.

"Sabka," I whispered. "Someone is poking me with the end of a rifle."

"The Gestapo have found us," Sabka said. "I'm not coming out from under the blanket. I don't want to see who is going to shoot me." 4641

The nudging continued, and I heard someone say something in a language I didn't understand.

"I don't think it is the Gestapo," I murmured. "I don't understand what the man is saying. I'm going to look if you'll let go of the blanket."

"Go ahead," said Sabka. "You look - but leave me alone. I'm not getting out from under this blanket." 4683

I sat up and saw two soldiers wearing strange uniforms and speaking a strange language. To me, they seemed as big as God. Although I was frightened, I listened to them. They spoke to me, but I couldn't understand anything they were saying, and I spoke seven languages. I started speaking to the soldiers in every language I knew, but they didn't understand me. I sat quietly on the ground and waited to see what they were going to do. Sabka stayed wrapped tightly under the blanket and wouldn't come out.

One of the young soldiers bent over to look closer at me - God knows I didn't look human. My eyes were bulging out of my head, my bones were sticking out of my skin, and Sabka and I were covered with lice and weighed about forty-

4683
five pounds. As the man bent down, a chain with dog tags fell loose from the collar of his shirt. On the chain, with the dog tags, was a little mezuzah (the Ten Commandments). At this point, I thought that Sabka and I were the only two Jews alive in Europe. I wanted Sabka to see it, but she wouldn't come out from under the blanket. I gathered all my strength, practically jumping up into the man's arms, kissing the mezuzah.

The young soldier looked kindly at me, for he must have realized I was a Jewish child. He motioned for me to stay where I was until he returned.

"These are not Gestapo," I said to Sabka, tugging at the blanket. 4690

"I'm not coming out," Sabka said decisively.

"But they are nice. One of the soldiers is Jewish. We are not the only two Jews left alive, Sabka. I know that soldier is Jewish. There are at least three Jews living," I insisted.

"I'm not coming out," Sabka asserted. 4724

In just a few moments, the two soldiers returned with other soldiers. One of them was able to speak to me in German.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I am fourteen," I replied. 4734

"Who are you hiding from and why do you look like this?" the man asked me. 4754

"We have escaped from a death march," I replied. "We were in a death camp, and the SS took us on a march and we escaped." 4761

The soldier didn't understand what I was talking about. He was angry and his voice rose as he asked, "What kinds of people do this to children?"

"The Nazis," I replied softly, but firmly. 4771

It was then that the soldier drew me, a frail, dirty, lice-covered girl, into his arms and said, "We are Americans; don't be afraid." 4787

I couldn't stop trembling, frightened, yet hopeful. "I didn't know the United States was fighting this war," I said.

"Hitler is losing the war, little one," he said. "Germany is burning." 4797

My mind assimilated all that he had said. "He must be telling the truth," I reasoned. "Otherwise, how would he know these things?"

I leaned over from the soldier's embrace and tried to pull the blanket from Sabka. 4817

"Sabka, come out. These men are Americans. They aren't going to hurt us."

"I'm not coming out!" 4827

I looked around at the men surrounding us. Their faces were young and fresh and their bodies healthy. Seeing the compassion on their faces, I realized that there were still people who cared. I looked up to the heaven, and I thanked God. It was the first time I had been able to speak to Him since that first night in Auschwitz.

The soldier holding me in his arms asked me, "Would you like something to eat?" 4833

That is when Sabka came out of the blanket!

Sabka asked, "Could we please have some scrambled eggs and a small loaf of bread so our impossible wish can become a reality?" 4854

Suddenly the men were laughing, crying, joyous in their small role in liberating two prisoners. The soldiers were scrambling eggs in their helmets, holding them over a fire. What a wonderful sight that was to us. They had no bread, but they gave me packs of crackers in little brown boxes. Sabka did not

share her eggs with me – but I was very happy that I had my crackers all to myself. Our dream had become a reality.

"We will help you begin to look like a fourteen-year-old girl should look," the soldier with the mezuzah told me. "In America, girls your age grow to be beautiful and strong. Don't worry. You are going to be safe from now on."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you for finding us. I am so happy that Hitler does not take the girls from America. I will never forget this day. What date is this?"

I could see the tears glistening in the soldier's eyes as he looked at me, "Today is May 7, 1945."

I knew that God had sent angels to liberate me. Sabka and I were no longer hungry, we were no longer cold, and we were no longer prisoners. What a gift!

That afternoon the soldiers talked with us about the war. The Americans informed us of what was going on, and we told the soldiers our story. The Americans listened incredulously. For me and Sabka, being able to talk freely, openly, loudly was bliss. We had been silenced for over a year. Hearing the laughing and comradeship, the teasing and joking, the conversation of compassionate human beings...oh what we had forgotten. The men treated us gently, as if we were their little sisters. When the soldiers gave us soap and a towel to go to the brook to clean ourselves, we were giddy with our good fortune. We talked and talked, discussing our unbelievable luck.

When we went back to the liberators' camp, we saw a Red Cross truck. The men helped us into the back of the vehicle and told us that this was where we were to sleep. Sabka and I could not believe our eyes. The two beds had lots of blankets, pillows, and white sheets and we didn't have to share it with ten people – we didn't have to share it with anyone. Again, these soldiers made our dream a reality. Crawling into the lux-

urious beds, we continued to talk and the SS were not there to kill us for talking.

"I can't believe that we have survived," Sabka said.

"I think we are really free," I replied. "Never have I seen such kindness."

We spoke again of the experiments we had been through, rehashing our thoughts and emotions during those difficult days. As we remembered the hardships we had survived, we thanked each other for the support that we had given the other. Somehow, God had always allowed one of us to have the strength to help each other when one of us was weak. As we conversed, our tears flowed – first tears of joy – then tears of sorrow.

"I miss my family," I said. "My mother and my father and my brothers and sister. Oh, how I wish they could be here with me tonight to celebrate this freedom."

"My parents," Sabka reflected, "always had such big dreams for me. Life will be empty without them."

"I still have my mother's diamonds," I told her. "After all this time, I guess my mother's four small diamonds are finally safe. Somehow, it's hard for me to believe that no one will ever try to take them away from me again. But those diamonds, as precious as they are to me, will never replace my dear mother. She loved me so much, Sabka. Never have I seen such love for children as that love of my mother's. My family did nothing for which to die - nor did yours. We must live our lives so that these things never happen again and we must live for them always."

"We will, Chana," Sabka cried softly. "That is the only way we can make our parents' lives meaningful. We will show the world that we did overcome the impossible and that hatred and intolerance cannot be permitted on this earth."

We finally slept.

In the morning, I woke and stretched. Thinking about the day ahead, I smiled to myself. "Today is the beginning of my new life." 5125

I looked over at Sabka, who was still sleeping. I thought about my friend and how God had blessed me with this "silent" friend. How wonderful – no roll call! Today there would be no marching, no work, no possibility of a selection. Today Sabka and I were free.

I said, "Sabka, wake up to the beginning of our free life together." 5136

Bob, the soldier wearing the mezuzah, opened the back door to the Red Cross van. He was carrying steaming scrambled eggs.

"Good morning," he said. "Are you girls ready for breakfast?" 5146

"I am," I said. "I have to get Sabka to wake up. She is a sleepy-head this morning." 5161

I sat up and shook my friend. Sabka did not stir. I shook my friend harder.

"There's something wrong with her," I said. 5166

Bob could hear the panic in my voice.

"Medic," he called.

The medic came into the back of the truck and gave Sabka an injection.

"Is she going to be OK?" I asked him. 5172

The medic went out of the truck to get the soldier who was able to speak to me. He looked sad as he climbed into the truck and sat at the end of my cot. "She will not wake up this time, little one. She died in her sleep," he explained.

"NO! NO!" I cried. I wanted to push him, to hit him, to fight his words, but I was still too weak. 5188

"She is free now, Chana. She is sleeping in a beautiful place. She is no longer sick. She will never be hungry or cold again and she knows that she is free." 5126

I was sobbing. Feebly, I rose from my bed and looked at Sabka closely. Her scrambled eggs Bob had brought her were on a plate, cold, at her feet. She looked like the corpses in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The color of her skin was gray, and she was still covered with wounds and sores from the lice. I screamed in fear. I was afraid that I, too, would die in my sleep. After all, I was covered with sores and wounds from the lice.

"Shhh." The medic, the soldier, and Bob tried to console me. They sat with me that morning and talked with me until I was calmer. I told them that Sabka was so afraid that the SS would kill her and that she would become ashes. The Americans assured me that Sabka had died knowing that she was free and realizing that the Nazis hadn't taken her life from her. 5125

"Sabka had typhus, Chana," explained the soldier I could understand. "There was nothing that you or anyone could do to save her. She probably lived as long as she did out of her love for you and her determination to help you survive. You have done nothing wrong." 5163

But I still questioned myself if I could have done something to help her live. She fought so hard to stay alive. For me, the loss seemed unbearable. Again I was losing a loved one. I felt that she was the last surviving member of my only family. I thought she was the friend and family that I would have forever. I couldn't understand why I should lose her, too. I was fourteen. How could I go on without her? Who should I look for and not find? I couldn't even enjoy my freedom.

The medic spoke to the soldier, and he relayed to me that I needed to choose a place to bury Sabka's body, and then we had to go on, because they had a war to fight.

"I want to find our blanket," I told them. "We slept so many nights under that blanket. I want to leave it with Sabka and wrap her body in it. If we wrap her in that blanket, I will know that a part of me will stay with her."

The men took me to the spot where we had been rescued. Had it only been twenty-four hours? There the blanket lay on the ground. We picked it up and shook it out and took it back to the truck to Sabka's body. We wrapped her in that blanket, and I chose to take her back to that exact spot where she had hid under the blanket the day before, afraid of the American soldiers. That place was where we had been given our freedom and another chance at life. The Americans dug a grave and reverently placed her body in the ground. The soldier explained to me that their group had talked it over, and they promised me that when the war was over, they would find me and bring me back to give Sabka a proper burial.

We walked back to the Red Cross truck and when I climbed in, Sabka's bed had been removed. There was only one bed – for me.

HOPE

Psalms 41:3 "The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness."

I traveled in the back of the Red Cross truck with the soldiers through the woods until we reached an army hospital. It was an American hospital near Pilzen, Germany. I saw Americans guarding the door and when we went inside, I was thankful that the facility was nothing like the infirmary in Auschwitz. The soldiers, my liberators, had to leave me in the hospital to go on to fight the hidden Nazis. They left me in the excellent hands of American medical personnel.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was in the beginning stages of typhus. Not only was my body weak, but my spirit was lower than it had been – even in the camps or on the death march. I thought about Sabka all of the time. She had endured so much. Together we were strong; alone I was vulnerable. My heart was heavy with grief. In my mind I knew that now I was free, now I was being taken care of and treated for my malnutrition and disease, but I also questioned the value of freedom. I had lost everyone. Was life really worth living? Was I really safe? Would the Nazis come into the hospital and kidnap me? I was afraid to live and yet afraid to die. Fearful of dying while I was sleeping, I was scared to sleep. Some nights the nurses would have to strap me to my bed because I was frightened, and I would run to

the window and try to get out when I would see a man in a uniform. Although I was hungry, when I ate I felt sick. The nurses had to force me to eat.

The American doctors spared no knowledge in trying to heal both my broken body and my shattered spirit. My stomach was swollen and it hurt; I had a fever and still had lice. Because I was so young, I think I had a good chance to get well and I was treated with extra kindness.

All of the other residents of the hospital were young military men who had been injured in the line of duty. One day, a general came into the hospital to visit the wounded men. He made a special visit to my bedside. Through an interpreter he asked me about the concentration camp and about my experiences in the death camps and the death march. The officer pulled four buttons from his sleeve and a scarf that he wore around his neck and gave them to me to keep. These became my first possession in my free world. Those four buttons and the purple scarf with yellow tulips were beautiful to me. Later I found out that the officer's name was General George Patton. Although I was too sick to realize it at the time, it was the work of General Patton and the selfless giving of his troops that saved my life. My liberators had been part of his Third Army.

I spent two months in the hospital in Pilzen. One day some American soldiers brought in an incoherent woman that they had found wandering in the forest. She was burning up with fever, but when she saw me, she ran to me and grabbed my face in her hands. The woman began crying for joy, but I couldn't grasp what she was doing.

"She thinks you are her daughter," one of the doctors explained.

I understood. I let her hold my face in her hands and sit next to me. She stared at me for such a long time. Finally, the doctors gave her something and she fell asleep.

The next day when the woman woke, she was lucid and explained to me that her eighteen-year-old daughter had died in Auschwitz-Birkenau. She told me that her daughter and another group of young girls had been taken to block seven. They had literally been drained of their own blood for plasma for the German army and allies. "I cannot live without her," she told me. "My head hurts too much and I want to be with her."

The doctors put the woman in another room, and she was eventually taken to a displaced persons camp. Miraculously, the doctors found that her son had survived Auschwitz, and they were later reunited.

Near the end of my stay in the Pilzen hospital, I felt much stronger, and I would walk through the halls looking for survivors of the Holocaust. I found myself constantly looking - searching for someone who I might know, that I might remember or who might remember me. I never found anyone. When I was strong enough to leave, I was assigned a guardian. My guardian took me to Salzburg, Austria to a displaced person's camp.

I asked my guardian, "Why me? Why do you think I have survived this? I don't want to be alone."

"It will be OK," he assured me. "These people will try to find a new home for you."

As we drove through the city of Salzburg, we saw piles of rubble from the bombings. The shops in the city were empty. The schools that I looked for were all closed. Eventually we reached a building, and my guardian took me into an office where I was processed into a displaced person's camp, bet-

ter known as a DP camp. It was in this office that I learned of two agencies that would be instrumental in helping me begin a new life. One agency was the UNRRA, or United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, and the other was HIAS, or the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. These agencies placed me in a real house with other survivors. Most of the survivors were adults, but there were forty children. I was placed with the children to await a trip to Sweden. In Sweden, I was to be housed in an orphanage with the other children, and I would wait for someone to adopt me.

While I was in the DP camp, I heard from one of my liberators. He had been discharged and was going home to America. He told me that he would place my name in newspapers in the United States to see if I had any family that would sponsor me to come to America. I knew that my father had some family living in the states, but I had never met them so my hopes were not high for someone recognizing me. Still, I was grateful to be living in a place where there was no fighting, and I was warm and had food.

Everyone in the DP camp was searching. Lists of survivors were often posted and occasionally someone would find a relative or a friend. I had no luck in finding anyone that I had known. I even wrote to Marya and Olena in my hometown of Poleno, but I never received a reply. The HIAS issued me a passport and a quota number for a dispatch to Sweden to the orphanage with forty other children. That was a waiting time because the borders to neighboring countries were closed. Because I was under fifteen, I hoped that I could soon leave the DP camp and go to Sweden.

One day I received a letter from my father's oldest brother, Nathan Seigelstein, who had been living in the Bronx in New York City for fifty years, and I never knew about it. He

informed me in the letter that he and his family would welcome me into their lives if I would come to America. I yelled so loudly that I'm sure the entire Seigelstein clan could hear me in New York. I was trembling with excitement and happiness. Immediately I went to the HIAS office to show them the letter and to give up my quota number to Sweden to another child. The officials in the HIAS office worked with me and my uncle to prepare for my trip to the United States.

It took two years to arrange for my voyage to America. During those years I was able to make a choice whether to stay in the camp the entire time, or go into the city of Salzburg, Austria to stay in a home. Another girl, two married couples, and two boys were in a group with me. We moved into the upstairs of a home owned by an old woman. The elderly lady was forced to share her home with victims of the concentration camp; she was the widow of an SS man who never returned home. For the first few days we were in the house, we didn't even realize that she was there. We were upstairs and the only room we used downstairs was the kitchen where we made coffee in the morning. The rest of the time, we walked back to the DP camp to eat our meals. The elderly lady's name was Herta (I can't remember her last name). She was mean, sneered at us and called me "invader." During the first week I was in the house, I played her piano, which was in the living room. She instructed me never to touch her piano again.

Her home was right under the Alps. Sometimes I would lie on the road and just bask in the warmth of the sunshine. I walked in the mornings and thought about ways to find survivors. I even tried to get to Innsbruck. When I would hear that survivors would be arriving into the DP camp, I always checked the list to see if there was anyone I knew.

In the evenings I went to the opera. The opera was my only education while I was in the DP camp. I didn't get to go to school, but the opera was so beautiful, so wonderful! The opera house was between four buildings in Salzburg. The acoustics were incredible. Even though it was nice to be in a house again, Herta was not a gracious host. One day we told her that she was going to have to learn to live with us in her home.

"I am going to make you so miserable," she said, "that you will be sorry you survived. I lost my family in the war, too."

We learned that her husband had been in the Gestapo. I never found out if she had any children, but she was bitter...so hostile and indignant. After only a few months, we decided to go back to the displaced persons' camp for the rest of our stay in Salzburg.

It seemed like such a long wait until I could go to America. Staying in the camp, I made new friends, and we waited together to travel to our future. One day a group of young boys and girls came to us and asked us to go to Palestine. They told us that the journey would be risky because we would be illegally entering Palestine. Everyone wanted to go but me. When I realized that I was going to be left alone again, without friends or family, and because I was an impressionable teenager, I decided to go. The group picked us up in a truck, and we drove to Italy where we waited on the beach, lying on the sand, for a boat to come and pick us up and take us the rest of the way to Palestine. For five days and nights, no boat came to get us. Some of us were still weak from the death camps, and we realized that being exposed to danger again was probably unacceptable. I decided to go back to the DP camp. Many of the others were

so tired by then that they decided to go back with me. We left the beach at night and went back to the truck and drove back to Salzburg to continue to wait for our "legal" trips to a place of safety.

In October, 1947, I received my official papers and an assignment to board a ship in BremenHafen, Germany. The ship was called the "Marine Fletcher," and it was an old converted military ship. The day I received my papers, I screamed for joy, and then I wept with sorrow. I had lost my entire family, but now I had found a new family, one that I barely knew existed. As I packed all my belongings into one suitcase, I understood that I was leaving the only home I had ever known, yet I knew I was leaving bloody atrocities and horrors to travel to a warm and loving land.

As the immigration officials were readying my papers to go to New York, one of them informed me that my passport was ready. When he handed me my passport, it said that my name was Irene Seigelstein.

I panicked. "This is not my name...Irene....I have never heard of that name," I cried.

"From this day forward, you are Irene," he replied. "That is a nice name. That is an American name."

I was ecstatic. I was so honored to have an American name.

"This is so wonderful," I thought. "Hmm...a new name, a new home, a new family. Now I can leave the child, Chana, behind. The future has to be brighter for Irene."

The van from the HIAS took me to the ship, and by the end of October, the liner began its voyage. I stood on the deck and looked back upon Germany and vowed never to look back again. For one last time, I tried to visualize my parents and my siblings being pushed into the gas chambers

in Auschwitz. Then I turned from my yesterdays and looked toward my many tomorrows.

The ocean was rough during the journey. I had never been aboard a ship before, and I was seasick. Compared to living through the concentration camp and the death march, being seasick was just an inconvenience. It took us ten days to reach New York City. We arrived during the night, and when the ship stopped I went out on the deck. When I saw the moving lights in the distance, I was overwhelmed. New York was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen in my entire life. It looked as if heaven was sitting right there with all the brightest stars in one place.

I spent the entire night trembling with excitement and looking out at New York City. None of the passengers could sleep because we were so thrilled. When daylight arrived, the city was just as beautiful. It was the morning of November 8, 1947. I had not seen a family member since 1944. Would I be able to recognize anyone in my new family? Before we disembarked I looked out from the deck and spotted a gentleman looking up at the ship. He looked exactly like my grandfather! I knew I was home.

I walked down the plank into my Uncle Nathan's arms and into the loving embrace of a family I had never seen. Feeling welcome and safe for the first time in years, I knelt and kissed the ground of the United States of America. I was crying for joy and unable to fully comprehend that I was really having such a wonderful experience. Although I couldn't speak English and couldn't talk with my young cousins, when I looked into their faces and touched them, we were able to understand each other. We drove through the Holland Tunnel into New Jersey to meet the rest of my

family. I could not believe my good fortune; I was in the greatest free country in the world, and I was a part of a strange, but loving family. I vowed to always look forward – to hope.

AMERICA

*Exodus 3:8 "So I have come down to rescue them
...and to bring them up out of that land into a
good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk
and honey."*

"America, America, God shed his grace on thee.
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from
sea to shining sea." I don't think I had ever
heard such beautiful words. Although I couldn't speak English,
just listening to the patriotic music made me eager to learn
everything I could about the United States...and to become a
citizen.

When I arrived in New York, I first moved in with my Uncle
Nathan and his wife, Helen. They had a son, Carl, and two
daughters, Sudi and Ida. Ida looked just like my Grandmother
Leah, my father's mother. My Uncle Nathan looked just like
my Grandfather Isaac. He was the same height as my grand-
father and even had the same white beard. My Aunt Helen
was a petite, dark-haired kind-looking little aunt. My cousin
Carl resembled his father and Sudi, the cousin closest to my
age, was beautiful. We couldn't communicate because I didn't
speak English. Nathan had paid my way to come to the United
States. He and Helen were very good to me, but they already
had three children. Ironically, their son Carl had been in the
United States Army serving in Pilzen while I was in the Pilzen
hospital after I was liberated, but we had never met.

Father had another brother in this country, David Seigelstein, and he and his wife Rose had guaranteed the state department that I would not be a burden on the government or the state. David and Rose had two daughters, Gail and Linda.

Ida and Sudi, my cousins who I stayed with first, were so nice, but they were busy with their friends and activities. Besides, New York was huge. I really enjoyed visiting my Aunt Fanny in New Jersey, so after a few months, I ended up moving in permanently with Aunt Fanny and Uncle Morris.

Aunt Fanny was my father's sister. She, my aunt Rose, my Uncle Nathan, my Uncle David, and another of my father's brothers, Martin, had come to live in the United States before the war. Martin, a cantor in a synagogue, had died in 1945 at a young age. Aunt Fanny became my second mother. Her husband, Morris Horowitz, had a cab-driving business. They had one daughter, Rita, who became my sister-cousin. Rita was two years older than I, and she became my mentor. She took me to enroll in night classes so I could learn English.

My Uncle Morris was a tremendous help to me in learning the language.

"We do not speak any language in this home except English," Uncle Morris told me. "If you have the privilege of living in this great nation, you will have to learn its language quickly." 5366

Rita later told me, "All Daddy knows how to speak is English. He was born here. Mother and I can speak your native tongue, but Daddy's just trying to help you learn faster." 5345

I did learn quickly. Everything in this country was fast-paced in comparison with what my life had been like with my family before the war. I loved living with Aunt Fanny, Uncle Morris, and Rita. We had running water and a bathroom at our house. I had never enjoyed such luxuries. We went to the

grocery store to buy food. Almost anything could be bought – at almost any time. It was easy to grow accustomed to the American way of life.

I had been in New Jersey about six months when Rita and I went to the grocery store one day for Aunt Fanny. It was a hot, summer day in 1948, and I was still grappling with my command of the language.

"OK, Irene," Rita said. "Look around and see if there's anything you want and just tell me." 5410

As Rita gathered the items for her mother in the fruit store, I was enthralled by the different sights and smells of fruit. I had never seen such a selection, and I didn't know what most of the items were.

Rita came back with her purchases and asked, "Have you decided what you'd like?"

"I would like an atomic bomb," I said slowly and carefully.

"What?" Rita roared with laughter.

"An atomic bomb," I answered emphatically.

"Point to the 'atomic bomb', Irene," Rita chuckled. 5436

I pointed to a strange-looking fruit lining the top shelf of the fruit section – a pineapple. Rita bought me the 'bomb,' and I thought it was absolutely delicious. When we went home, she relayed the funny story to her mom and dad, and, of course, they told my other uncles. The 'bomb' became a source of humor for many family gatherings. How good it was to laugh!

Cousin Rita helped me to get a job at a bakery near our house. I worked during the day, and at night I would go to night school. Rita introduced me to her friends, and I quickly made friends of my own. My life in New Jersey was so much fun.

After two years, I was able to find a full-time job and give up my language classes. I started working for RCA in Harrison, New Jersey. I worked on an assembly line and eventually the company sent me to Rutgers to learn some engineering. I became a skilled worker, and I was proud of myself. I worked at RCA for eight years, all the while living with my aunt and uncle.

During those years, from 1947 until 1956, I kept the promise I'd made myself. I only planned for my future. I tried to block out all of my painful memories. Sometimes, my dreams would wake me...I would remember my many encounters with death. I couldn't keep the past from nagging itself into my thoughts occasionally. Some nights while I was out socializing with friends, I'd hear them talk about their high school experiences.

"I wish I had been able to have those experiences, but they must never know the horrors I've witnessed," I would think to myself.

During the times my friends reminisced, I'd sit quietly and smile outwardly. I had been fourteen years old when I had escaped from the death march, and I was sixteen when I finally arrived in New York. Oddly, I was ashamed of my past. I knew that it was too horrendous to share with anyone. When I thought of my experiences, I didn't feel "normal." But while my friends shared humorous stories, the image of three young blind girls haunted me.

"Shima, Israel," they had pleaded.

"I will never forget you," I had promised. "I will be your voice."

"God, please forgive me," I pleaded silently. "I can not talk about that nightmare. I can not tell of those torturers who tried to destroy our scriptures, our Torah, our temples, our hu-

manity. I know that no one would believe me anyway. In this country, the Jews are free. I've been delivered into America, the land of milk and honey, the promised land. I can not be the voice that I promised to be."

I bargained with God, pushed the thoughts away...as far away as possible, and laughed with my friends.

Aunt Fanny, Uncle Morris, Rita and I went to temple regularly, the Beth-el Temple in New Jersey, right across the Hudson River from New York. I became a member of the B'nai Brith Women. As chairman of the Israeli Bond Drive, I organized all the events to try to sell bonds. I really think that was my way of starting to give of myself...of my good fortune in life. After the Holocaust, thousands of immigrants flooded Israel, and the country was in danger of economically collapsing. Golda Mier, the future Prime Minister of Israel, had spoken about the sale of the bonds. I remember her saying that all the country had for collateral was the children and the State of Israel. That was all I needed.

Ironically, it had taken two thousand years for Israel to rebuild itself into a nation, and it took only a few years of selling Israeli bonds for the country to become a world leader and a refuge for much of humanity.

The Israeli Bond Drive not only changed the course of Israel's history, it also changed the life of Irene, the all-American girl, forever.

BAGELS AND LOX

Song of Songs 2:10 – 11 "My lover spoke and said to me, 'Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.'"

Herman Weisberg sat at a table with his friends. With ten thousand dollars in his pocket, he was ready to make one of the largest purchases in his life. Of course, I didn't know who he was; I certainly had no idea that he had that much money to spend. He was watching me. I could feel his eyes follow my new, white-knit suit as I worked the crowd. The reception was large, and the guests were enjoying themselves. Before I knew it, I had sold my allotment of bonds and was ready to go to the kitchen to prepare bagels and lox for the guests.

Freda, one of my friends working with B'nai Brith, hurried into the kitchen, "Irene, you need to come to my table. There's a man there who insists he will only buy bonds from you."

"Who is it?" I asked her.

"I don't know his name," she answered. "He is at the head of the table where I am working, and he has been watching you all night."

I peeked out the door of the kitchen, and sure enough, there sat the man whose eyes I had felt following me all evening.

54448

54467

911 5's
4471

Boldly, I walked over to his table.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

"I would like to buy ten thousand dollars worth of bonds," he replied.

"I will find someone who can help you," I answered. 450

"Oh, no, you don't. I will only purchase bonds from you, pretty girl," he smiled.

"I'm very sorry," I replied. "I have no more bonds. I have already sold all of mine." 4521

"Are you crazy?" Freda whispered. She pulled me aside. "I have bonds left and so do some of the other women. I'll gather enough for him and you can sell them." 4542

I turned back to the man and said, "I'll be right back." 4546

As I returned to his table, I couldn't help but notice his bright blue eyes and the width of his shoulders. He seemed to know everyone in the room, and his smile touched my heart. I didn't want him to know that, though.

"I have your bonds," I told him. 4550

"What's your name, sweetheart?" he asked. 4558

"My name is Irene," I answered.

He pulled me down so he could whisper in my ear. "My name is Herman. After we get these bonds put in order, I want to take you for breakfast." 4588

"We are serving bagels and lox for breakfast here. I can't go with you. I'm in charge of this reception and besides, I don't even know you." 4604

"You'll soon know me very well," he said confidently. "If it will make you feel better, you can ask one of your friends to come with us. I don't want to eat breakfast here with this crowd. Let's go somewhere else where we can talk." 4659

5 5's
4681

Impulsively, I rushed into the kitchen. "Freda, let's get someone to take over for us and go with Herman and his friend to breakfast."

"Are you sure, Irene? This isn't like you to want to leave." 4691

"I'm sure," I told her. "There's just something about this man that intrigues me." 54700

We got our coats and walked with Herman and his friend outside of the temple. It was after midnight, but I knew my Aunt Fanny would be asleep and wouldn't worry about me. It was in March of 1956, and the air was fresh with spring. Herman touched my shoulder as he helped me slip on my coat. My heart was pounding.

"What is wrong with me?" I thought to myself. "I'm being silly." 4708

We walked outside of the reception hall in the temple, and Herman escorted us to a brand new Buick Special. He helped me into the back seat, and Freda rode in the front seat with his friend, Monte, who was driving. Herman was unlike any man I had ever met. He was so sure of himself - so handsome and charming. 4715

"Before we go to breakfast, I want to stop and check on something," he said. 4728

"That's fine," I replied. "I am in no hurry."

He pulled up to the front of a bar, got out, and opened the back door for me and Freda. 4733

"I'm not going in there," I exclaimed. "What kind of girls do you think we are? We don't go into bars!" 4747

"We aren't staying here," he laughed. "Just walk in here with me for a few minutes. I was in here last evening, and I must admit I had too much to drink. I just want to make sure that I didn't say anything out of line and offend the owner." 4770

5 4795

Freda and I walked with Herman and his friend into the bar. I should have known at that point that Herman was going to be very special in my life. I had never, ever gone into a bar. This man had a magnetic pull on my heart in the first thirty minutes of our meeting. I could not believe that I had strolled into a bar in Newark, New Jersey with a man I scarcely knew.

Herman was true to his word. We were only in the bar for a few minutes before he had spoken with the owner, and we were on our way. The owner assured him that he hadn't insulted anyone the night before.

Herman took us to the Waukee Diner in Newark. The diner was crowded, but the owner knew Herman and we quickly got a table. Again, it seemed as if he knew everyone. I watched in amazement as he led us to our table, stopping to shake hands and chat with people on the way. The waitress soon came to take our order.

"What will you be having," she inquired.

"We'll have bagels and lox," Herman responded, smiling at me.

I laughed aloud. "We could have had bagels and lox at temple."

"But I couldn't have had you alone at temple," he said.

"You were too busy working and selling your bonds."

"That was what I was supposed to do."

"I know, but we wouldn't have been able to talk. Tell me about yourself."

A chill ran up my spine. I didn't want to tell him about myself - not now, not yet.

"My name is Irene Seigelstein. I live with my Aunt Fanny and my Uncle Morris. I work at RCA. I have a cousin Rita who just recently married."

"...and you are active with the Israeli Bond Drive," he finished for me.

"Yes." I couldn't stop grinning at him. He was such a charmer - so boyish, yet so manly.

"Tell me about yourself," I said.

"Well, there's really not much to tell. I am the oldest boy in a family of five siblings. I am self-employed in the scrap metal business. My father started the business, but about ten years ago, he was blinded at a fourth-of-July celebration by a firecracker. I was fighting in Korea at the time, but happened to be home on leave. The army let me stay home to take care of my family when my dad became disabled. Luckily, the United States Army gave me an early discharge. I've been running the business ever since."

"Are you close to your brothers and sisters?" I asked wistfully.

"Oh, yes - matter of fact, I think I see my brother coming in right now."

I looked and saw a familiar man approaching our table. I couldn't quite place him, but I knew that I had seen him somewhere before. The man and his attractive date pulled up chairs to our table.

"Irene, this is my brother Izzie," Herman introduced us.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" Izzie asked.

"I think so," I answered. Then it dawned on me. "Aren't you the man that Vida told me about a few months ago?"

"Vida...Vida," he tried to remember. "Oh yes. I saw you at a reception at temple. I remember now."

"You were the loud guy," I blurted before I realized what I was saying.

Herman burst out laughing. "That's my brother," he said.

Izzie introduced his date, Jennie, to us, and we chatted like we had known each other all of our lives. Herman explained how we had met earlier in the evening, and then he turned to his brother.

"This is the woman I'm going to marry," he stated.

"What?" asked Izzie. "You didn't tell me anything about this."

"It's the first I've heard of it, too," I retorted. 6071

Everyone at the table was laughing and having great fun. Freda was giggling at Herman's friends, and I couldn't take my eyes off of the man who had just proposed to me – or at least seemed to think I was going to marry him. The hours flew, and it was almost dawn when we left the diner. Herman took Freda home first and then his friend.

We arrived at my home and he said, "I want to see you tomorrow."

"I want to see you tomorrow, too," I whispered softly, "but I have driving lessons."

"You can drive my car," he smiled.

"Oh, no. I couldn't do that. I am finished at four o'clock, though." 6104

"I'll be here," he replied. He looked down into my eyes for a long time as if he was searching for something. He walked me to the door, and then he turned to go.

My hands were shaking as I let myself into the house. Although I went to bed, I couldn't sleep. The thoughts of his eyes, his hands, and his smile filled my mind. I had heard of love at first sight, but I had never believed that it could happen like this.

When I finished my driving training the next afternoon, there he was. I took him in the house to meet Aunt Fanny, and she, too, fell in love with him. That night we went for a drive,

and he told me that he would like to take me out for a real date the next evening...just the two of us.

"What would you like to do?" Herman asked me. "I will do anything you really want to do." 6114

"Harry Belafonte is in town," I told him. "I adore Harry Belafonte. I know it is probably too late to get tickets to see him in concert, but that is what I would really like to do." 6152

"I'll pick you up tomorrow evening and we'll go see Harry Belafonte," he said. 6174

I really didn't think that he could get tickets to the concert, but the next evening he arrived at Aunt Fanny's with two tickets to the Harry Belafonte show.

"Where are you two going tonight?" she asked him.

"Irene has wanted to see Harry Belafonte," he answered. "We will be going to that concert." 6194

I couldn't believe it. I don't know how he got tickets, much less front row seats, but he did.

Herman and I became inseparable. Each evening after we finished our jobs, we spent every minute together. In June, he officially asked me to marry him. 6214

"I want to marry you, Herman. I love you. I think we need to take our time and get to know each other better, though," I told him. As I said those words to him, I knew I was lying to him and to myself. I didn't want to wait to marry him. This was the man I wanted to spend every moment with for the rest of my life. Still, there was so much he didn't know about me. I felt like I needed to be honest with him. 2

"What more is there to know, Irene?" he asked patiently.

"Herman, I am a survivor of the Holocaust," I declared. "There are many things you don't know about me."

"I know I love you," he said. "Where you have been and what you have gone through, that is the past." 6262

6270

"I was thirteen when the Nazis invaded Hungary."

"I realize that, Irene. That is part of a history that we can forget," he assured me. 6290

"I was a prisoner in Birkenau, in Auschwitz, in Majdanek, in Neuengamme, and I survived a death march. My parents and my brothers and my little sister...they all died in Auschwitz-Birkenau." 6310

"Irene, I can't even imagine what you have been through in your life. But I love you. You have come to this country, and you have succeeded in finding a job and building a new life for yourself. Now I want to be a part of that life. God saved you for me." 6340 6381

I started to cry. "But you don't understand." 6385

"Understand what?"

"When I was in Birkenau and Auschwitz there was a doctor named Dr. Mengele. I was selected to participate in some of his medical experiments. Herman, I was given drugs in my broth every day. Those drugs were meant to destroy my reproductive ability. I don't know if I can ever give you children." 64

"Is that what this is all about?" Herman asked, drawing me close into his strong arms. "Sweetheart, don't you realize that I love you for who you are. We can have children, Irene. If we can't have biological children, we can adopt. I know you want a family as much as I do." 648

"Oh, Herman, I want a family more than you will ever know."

"And you shall have a family," he assured me. "The family will begin with me and you. If you will marry me, we will be Mr. and Mrs. Herman Weisberg." 651

I don't think I had ever been so happy. Herman became my family. We began planning our wedding and inviting our

friends, and the summer of 1956 was filled with a flurry of parties, showers, and wonderful memories.

On October 27, 1956, I married Herman in the Avon Catering Hall in Newark, New Jersey. There were five hundred guests in attendance, and we were wed in a traditional Jewish ceremony. Aunt Fanny and Uncle David gave me away. My Uncle Nathan had died the year before, but the remainder of my father's family were there to celebrate the happy occasion with me. My sister-cousin Rita was my Matron of Honor. Izzie was Herman's best man. We had a reception before the wedding and dinner after the wedding.

During one of the first dances after the wedding, I was dancing with my uncle, and I overheard Izzie talking to one of his friends.

"When she dances with my brother," he said, "you cut in and we'll get her out of here."

"I've got the airline ticket," he continued. "Won't that be a fix for Herman when he finds out that his wife is in Florida by herself and he's still here with a two-day drive before he can get to her on his honeymoon?" 6577

I realized what Izzie was planning. He was attempting to follow through with an old Jewish tradition of stealing the bride - ME - on her wedding day. I wasn't about to let that happen.

I smiled happily at Herman across the dance floor and guided my Uncle David closer to my new husband. When the dance was over, I kissed David's cheek and wrapped my arms around my tall, handsome spouse.

"Don't you let go of me," I whispered.

"I don't intend to ever let go of you," he murmured softly. 65992

"No, I mean right now. Izzie and his friends are going to try to steal me."

"That sounds like something he would do," Herman chuckled. "Let's get out of here."

"We can't leave just yet, Herman. It would be rude. Let's dance all the dances together though. Don't let anyone cut in."

6647

"That suits me just fine," he spoke softly in my ear.

Herman and I drove for two days to get to the Eden Rock Hotel in Miami, Florida. Our honeymoon was magical. We walked on the beach during the day, ate dinner and danced in the evenings. After Herman would go to sleep I would watch him breathe. I couldn't believe that this man was my husband. There was no way that he could ever know what a void he had filled in my life...what joy had sprung from our breakfast of bagels and lox.

FAMILY

Proverbs 17: 6 "Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children."

When Herman and I returned to Elizabeth, New Jersey we rented an apartment and couldn't have been happier. I stayed in touch with my Aunt Fanny, but Herman's family quickly embraced me as a part of their large, loving family. His mother was from Poland, and his father was from Russia, and they had immigrated to the United States before the Holocaust. Herman had been born in the U.S. In addition to Izzie, he had a brother, Nelson, and two sisters, Rosie and Annie. Herman ran his business, H&W Scrap Metal, in Elizabeth, and although his father, Jacob, was blind, he wanted to know everything that was happening in the workplace. It was so wonderful to have a family surrounding me.

I continued to work for RCA and other than my nightmares, I was able to put the past behind me. During the day I looked forward to going home to Herman. The thoughts of having a baby filled my mind, but after a year of trying, I felt like I wasn't going to be able to conceive. In December of 1957, I had a heavy heart. I was beginning to suffer from depression. It had been ten years since I had arrived in the United States, and I had rebuilt my life. Herman and I both had good jobs, and we had a cute apartment. An overwhelming sense of sad-

ness filled me during that month, and I needed to explain my feelings. I was afraid to tell Herman of the loss that I was feeling; I was fearful that he would think I was mixed-up or crazy, so I just remained silent.

My dreams were troubled. I especially remember one dream in particular. I dreamed that I had children of my own. The SS chased me with the children into a park in New Jersey. I hid with them in the park. Sometimes I would wake Herman while I was dreaming. He would hold me close and reassure me that we didn't have any children and that I was safe. I couldn't understand my nightmares.

In January of 1958, I felt sick. Depression filled my soul, and I was tired and nauseous. My arm, where the number had been tattooed in the camp, hurt. It was blue in color, something I had never noticed before. Herman told me, "You need to go to the doctor, Irene."

"I don't want to go to the doctor. I'm just tired. When I come home from work I just want to go to bed and sleep." 668

"All right," Herman said. "You can come home and sleep. But if you aren't feeling better in a couple of weeks, I'm going to get an appointment with Dr. Lowenstein, and you are having a good check-up."

"I'm not going, Herman. He will ask me what happened to my arm, and I don't want to talk about it with him...or with anyone." 674

"Don't be silly, Irene," he insisted. "I'll give you two weeks." 675

In February I was still no better, so Herman made an appointment for me to have a complete physical. I was really afraid of what Dr. Lowenstein might find. I couldn't help but think about all the injections I had received from Dr. Mengele. Now I knew that he had been experimenting with different

types of viruses. I wondered if one of them was just now affecting my body.

After Dr. Lowenstein examined me, he asked me to come and have a seat in his office. I was nervous and became even more disturbed when he asked the nurse to call Herman into his office from the waiting room.

"Is there something wrong with me?" I questioned.

Herman looked at me apprehensively and reached over and held my hand.

"There's nothing wrong with you that time won't cure," he laughed. "Congratulations, you two. You're going to have a baby." 6705

Tears of joy filled my eyes as Herman wrapped me in a bear hug and swept me off my feet. I wasn't dying! I wasn't sick! Perhaps God had been trying to tell me through my dreams that I was going to have children, and that he would be with me to protect them.

Spring returned. I felt whole again, knowing that a new life, a new Jewish family, was growing inside of me. Herman was protective of me, and we planned our future...our family. I wanted to work for six months so that I could have maternity benefits, and he agreed to let me continue as long as I felt up to it. We decided that I wouldn't return to work after the baby was born; I would stay home and be a full-time mother.

On September 2, 1958, Mark Lawrence Weisberg entered the world at Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, New Jersey. I had a difficult delivery, for he weighed in at eleven pounds and was twenty-two inches long. Herman and I were ecstatic with our new baby boy.

"Our son needs a house," Herman told me one day shortly after we had come home from the hospital. 6716

"We have plenty of room for the time being," I assured him. 673

"No, Irene, we are a family now. I have been looking around and I have found an affordable home for our family in Hillside. It isn't far from here and it is a nice community for children." 67

Within a few months we were moved and settled in our new home. I was so grateful to God for providing for me, but sometimes I became angry. I couldn't tell Herman everything about my past; I just kept it all bottled up inside of me. I missed my mother more after Mark was born than I ever had before. I wanted to share him with her, but she was only present in my mind. Her diamonds were in a safe deposit box. When I had come to the United States, my Aunt Fanny had helped me get the box at the bank, and I had not ever taken them out of that box. I thought of them from time to time, but I tried so hard to focus on the present and the future. The diamonds were a part of a painful past.

Shortly after Mark's first birthday, I learned that I was pregnant again. Herman couldn't have been happier.

"Let's have a little girl, this time, sweetheart," he told me. 6771

"I can't just order a little girl," I laughed.

"Yes, you can. Just believe that we are going to have the most beautiful little girl to grow up with our little man. She should be here in the summer." 6801

He was right. On June 26, 1960, Robin June entered our lives. She was a seven-pound bundle of joy, and when she looked at me with her bright blue eyes I saw great tomorrows for the Weisberg family.

We took our daughter home and embraced the life God had offered us. The years when the children were small were

such happy years. Herman was a blessing to me. He was my loving husband, my friend, my partner...really he was my life. He helped me to achieve an impossible dream. I never wanted my children to know anything of my past, and he helped me keep my experience of the Holocaust away from them.

I became Irene Weisberg in every way. Chana Seigelstein was a memory for me. Her life was so unbearable that I could not share it with the man whom I loved more than anything. I wanted to shelter those I loved. I never wanted my children to feel differently. Wanting them to grow up as American children in an atmosphere of learning, I pushed them for perfection.

I was especially thankful for Herman's parents. My children had grandparents. Only once did they question why they only had one set of grandparents.

"Your mother's parents were killed during the war," Herman told them gently. "It was a very difficult time for her. She doesn't want to talk about it." 6824

When Robin was in first grade, we bought a much larger home in South Orange, New Jersey. Herman was everything a child could wish for in a father. He drove Mark to football practice and basketball practice. Robin took clarinet lessons and piano lessons. Both children went to public schools. I never told them how lucky they were to be able to go to school, but sometimes I think I pushed them too hard. If one of them brought home a paper with a ninety, I wanted them to try to make one hundred the next time.

Although I didn't think about it at the time, I'm sure it was difficult for Robin and Mark to grow up with a Holocaust survivor as a parent. I wanted the best for them, and perhaps at times I was overprotective, trying to shield them from any heartache.

Sunshine filled my life during those years. Even when Robin and Mark would argue over a toy, I would laugh. I knew I was rebuilding a family for my parents and my siblings. In this wonderful country, Jews were accepted and free. My children went to school and enjoyed activities with all of their friends, just as I had before Hitler had filled the Germans' minds with bigotry. We were able to go to temple and exercise our freedom of religion. While Herman, Mark, and Robin were accustomed to the liberties in the United States, I don't think I ever took my independence for granted. The child, Chana, had seen too much to ever forget the price of liberation.

Chana...how long ago that life seemed now. I began thinking of my promise to be the voice for the children in Auschwitz-Birkenau. I couldn't...I couldn't. Who would believe such a nightmare? I couldn't talk about our torturers who almost destroyed our humanity. I focused on my tomorrows, because my yesterdays were all about Auschwitz and Birkenau. Even in my free world, my nightmares remained the same. The ashes were grayer and the cries louder; the pain in the children's eyes was clearer. When I woke, I had to force myself to remember where I was. How could I be the voice I had promised to be? I realized that I must learn from my yesterdays in order to rebuild the family I had lost.

HEARTACHE

Proverbs 15:13 "A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit."

We had been married for ten years when Herman surprised me with a trip to a local jewelry store.

"I want to buy you a cocktail ring for our anniversary," he said. "Choose one that you really like." ⁶⁸³⁰6841

The jeweler's name was Michael. After showing us his rings from the display case, he said, "I have some rings that I have designed myself. They are pricier, but would you like to see them?" ⁶⁸⁷¹

"This little lady has given me ten years of happiness and two beautiful children," Herman answered. "Let us see the designer rings." ⁶⁸⁸⁰

Michael went to the rear of the store and brought back the intricate, exquisite jewelry. I was both delighted and excited as I chose an anniversary gift.

Herman slipped the ring on my finger and laughed, "I know it is a cliché, Irene, but a diamond is forever."

A vise slipped around my heart and tightened. "My mother's diamonds..." I thought.

"Forever?" ⁶⁸⁹³

The four loose stones had been in the safe-deposit box for almost twenty years. I had been successful in forgetting they were there...most of the time. Then my mother's voice

would whisper softly, "Never forget they are in your possession. Guard them closely and never sell them, unless..." It was at this point in my memory that I would push my mother's diamonds away. 6918

Herman sensed that something was bothering me. "What is it, Irene?" 6978

"It is nothing. Today celebrates the happiest day we have shared. I love my ring. It will always be a reminder to me of the family we have built and of our first ten years together. How are you going to top this gift in ten more years?" 698

"I'll come up with something," he grinned. 6975

Even after ten years together, Herman still made me get goose bumps when he came up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist. He was as fit at thirty-eight as he had been when we met. I tried to forget about the diamonds in the bank box, but every time I looked at my beautiful ring, those stones came to my mind. One day, on a whim, I drove to Michael's jewelry store.

"Are you here to pick out something else for yourself," Michael teased, "or are you going to surprise Herman with a little something?" 6996

I smiled, but my voice cracked as I told him, "Neither."

"Is there a complaint about your jewelry?" he questioned.

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. I love my ring. I just wanted to ask if you would be able to do something for me." 702

"I'll try."

"My parents were killed in a concentration camp in Europe during the war." It was a struggle for me to say those words. 7046

"I'm sorry," Michael said softly.

"My mother gave me four diamonds before she died. They are small and probably not very valuable, but I wanted

7066 to see if you could design a piece of jewelry for me using my mother's stones." I couldn't believe how nervous I was. 7096

"I would be honored, Irene. You and Herman sit down and talk about what you want me to do. Come back in, bring the diamonds with you, and we'll go from there." 7110

"First I have to tell Herman about them," I thought.

That night after dinner I asked Herman to come into the den. He was getting ready to go bowling, and I wanted to explain to him what I had done, and why I felt the need to do something with mother's diamonds. As I talked to him, I began to cry. 7120

"Shhh...Irene. There's no need for tears. You know I'll support you in whatever you need to do." He sat beside me on the couch and turned my face toward his. "Why didn't you tell me you had something that had been your mother's?" 7150

"Herman, I have tried to put my painful past behind me. I want to forget. I don't want anyone to have to know of the horrible things I have been through. Most of all, I want to protect you and Mark and Robin." 7192

"But, Irene," he said, "those diamonds are all you have of your mother's...of anything from your family. Someday Robin should have them." 7212

"I know," I cried softly. "I've just never been able to talk about them."

7230 Herman looked at me closely. "How were you able to hide them for a year and a half - while you were in the camps?"

"I swallowed them," I whispered. 7245

A look of horrible understanding came into his eyes. "Oh, no. Oh, baby, no. I'm so sorry. I really have no idea of what your life was like during those years." 7267

"I don't want to talk about it anymore, but I would like to have the stones mounted into a piece of jewelry."

7289

7230
 "Why not have them shaped into a teardrop, sweetie?" Herman suggested. "It would be symbolic of all the tears your mother cried...and all the tears you have shed because of your suffering and loss." 7262

A weight lifted from my body and I smiled.

"That is a beautiful idea," I replied. 7267

Herman continued. 7270 "Have them set into a pendant, and you can wear them close to your heart."

"Oh, I don't think I can wear them, Herman. I'd just like to have them in a nice setting to pass to Robin someday." 7290

"You'll wear them," Herman smiled. "When the time is right... you'll carry your mother with you." 7300

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ 7311

Three more anniversaries passed, and we were blissfully happy. Herman was on a bowling league and one night a week was "boys' night out." One evening attempting to bowl his second three-hundred game, he had a pain shoot from his chest - down his left arm. Izzie, his brother, rushed him to the hospital. I will never forget that date. It was January 20, 1969. When I arrived at the hospital, the doctors told me that my husband was in critical condition, and that he needed open-heart surgery in order to survive.

We found the best surgeon in the United States to try to save my husband's life. In fact, he had performed the exact same surgery on President Dwight D. Eisenhower. When Herman came home from the hospital, we had to change some of our eating habits. I followed the doctor's orders perfectly and so did Herman. By summer he was able to resume his daily activity at our home, but he wasn't allowed to work. Even though there were times that I could tell he was frus-

trated because he couldn't go into work, I could tell that he enjoyed having the time to watch Mark and Robin grow.

Early in November, Herman's doctor told him that he could begin going into work for a few hours a day, and he encouraged him to start walking. When he returned home from the doctor on that Friday afternoon, he was excited.

"Finally, I can begin to live again," he said to me.

I hugged him and said a silent prayer of thanks for my husband's recovery.

"Since you're so much better," I told him, "why not take Mark to get a haircut? 7330

When the two returned from the barber, dinner was not quite ready.

"Let's take a walk around the block, Dad," said Mark. He was so glad that his dad was feeling better. The two walked in the crisp November air and returned home with rosy cheeks.

We had a wonderful Sabbath dinner that evening. We lit our candles and relaxed. Mark and Robin were excited because they were going to get to stay up late.

7350 "Irene, you have been cooped up with me for all these months," Herman said. "Why don't you go spend some time with your friends tonight? Beverly called earlier today, and she's having some of your friends for dessert. I want you to go." 7380 7388

"Not tonight, Herman. I want to be with you."

"Oh, honey. Go on over there for an hour or so. It will be good for you." 7340 7345

Reluctantly I agreed, and I walked to Beverly's house, which was only three houses down the street. The girls and I ended up playing canasta and had a wonderful time.

When I got home, Mark and Robin had already gone to bed, and Herman was sitting in the den watching "The Johnny Carson Show."

"Come sit with me, sweetheart," he said.

I snuggled next to him on the sofa.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking while you were out," he said.

"Oh, really..." I replied playfully.

7431 Herman was serious. "I can't believe that Mark and Robin are growing up so quickly," he said. "It seems like only yesterday that we were afraid we weren't going to be able to have children."

"I know," I smiled. "What a blessing those two have been in our lives!" 7464

"I booked a catering hall tonight for Mark's Bar Mitzvah," he told me. "I made reservations for 150 couples." 7480

"Herman! Mark's Bar Mitzvah is two years from now. Don't you think this is a little early?" I questioned. 7500

"Well, I just got it on my mind and thought I might as well do something about it. At least we have the hall in advance. There's a waiting list for it, you know." 7510 7530

"Not a two-year waiting list," I said.

Herman smiled. "Let's go to bed. I've had a busy day. I'm so glad to be feeling like my old self again." 7555

We went into the bedroom to get ready for bed, and I heard Herman in the bathroom brushing his teeth. He was in such a good mood.

As I pulled my nightgown over my head, I heard a loud crash. Rushing into the bathroom, I could see Herman wedged between the shower and the basin. He was still upright, but he was gasping. I rushed to the phone to dial for help.

By the time the paramedics arrived at the house, Herman was dead. It was November 8, 1969. I was thirty-eight years old, entering another Holocaust. I lost the love of my life.

FACING MY PAST

*Job 10: 20 – 21 "Are not my few days almost over?
Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy
before I go to the place of no return, to the land of
gloom and deep shadow."*

In 1990, I moved to Pembroke Pines, Florida. My children had both graduated from high school and college. During the years following Herman's death, I remarried, but the marriage didn't work. The love of my life had been Herman, and like my mother, father, and siblings, I had lost him, too.

I devoted my life to my children. When Mark celebrated his Bar Mitzvah, I wore my mother's diamonds for the first time. I missed Herman, but I had my mother's love around a chain on my neck, reminding me that I must stay strong for my children.

When Mark was in junior high school, he had been studying World War II, Hitler's rise to power, and the concentration camps in history class. He asked me if I knew someone who had been there who he could interview for his paper. I told him yes. I told him to write down the questions before the interview. The day he had to do his homework, I asked to see the questions. I was reading them, and I was answering them. When he realized that I was answering his questions, he asked "How do you know all of that?" When I told him that I was the Holocaust survivor he was supposed to interview, he

couldn't bear it. He rushed from the kitchen table where he had been doing his homework and slammed the door behind him to his room. It was just as I had feared; the truth was too unbelievable for him – or for anyone else for that matter.

But in 1994, the movie *Schindler's List* came out. I decided to go see the movie because of the favorable publicity it was generating. It was a difficult decision for me to go see the movie, because I knew that the subject would be painful. I knew that old memories would be conjured in my mind... memories that I had tried to repress. Still...something inside me urged me to go...and I did.

That movie changed my life. Sitting in the darkened theater as the credits rolled down the screen, I vowed to become the voice I had promised to be almost fifty years before. I decided I had to talk about the torturers that almost destroyed our scriptures, our Torah, our temples, our humanity. I knew it would be difficult to describe so much sorrow in this free world in which I now lived.

Over the years, my nightmares had never ceased. Always the ashes were grayer and the children's screams louder, but the painful dreams were all similar. When I would wake, I would drown the memories of the suffering eyes of children, and I would swim toward consciousness, fighting to remember where I was.

As I sat alone in that theater, I decided to not only live for the present, but also to focus on my tomorrows. My yesterdays had been filled with Auschwitz and Birkenau, and I had never faced those yesterdays. Somewhere in my broken past were valuable lessons that I could teach humanity. I knew that I needed to grasp those horrible memories and turn them into something positive to share with the present and future generations.

I had only been thirteen, just a child, when I had witnessed injustice and intolerance against humanity. The children of my future could learn from my pain. But how? How could I teach them? How could I speak after fifty years of silence?

As I sat there, I thought of Sabka. The last words that she had said to me reverberated through my mind, "We will show the world that we did overcome the impossible and that hatred and intolerance cannot be permitted on this earth."

With tears streaming down my cheeks, I remembered the children. I knew that I could do nothing to help them, but I could do something to help the children of the future. I decided, in that silent theater, to make children the focus of the remainder of my life. I also knew that it was my duty to bear witness.

Ironically, one of my friends, Frances Rubel, called me later that week and said she needed to speak with me; she wanted to talk about a trip she had taken called the March of the Living. I told her to come over and we would talk about it.

"Irene," said Frances. "I know that you are a survivor of the camps. I have had a difficult time facing my past, and I know that you have, too. This trip was the most horrible, most wonderful thing I've ever experienced."

What did you do on this March of the Living?" I asked. "We visited the death camps throughout Poland, and then we ended the journey in Israel," Frances answered.

"Oh, I don't think I could do that. I don't want to go back. I have had to fight so hard to get the horrors of my past into the depth of my brain; I don't want to take a chance that I might let those memories surface."

7622
7626
7674

"Irene, in order to move forward into the future, you must face your past." 7615

"I'm sorry, Frances," I told her. "It has taken me fifty years to even admit that I was a part of those atrocities. I have decided to talk to school children about hatred, prejudice, and intolerance. I just cannot bring myself to go back to those places where I suffered so much in my childhood. It is unthinkable." 7710 7743 7747

"Well, just think about it," Frances said.

As the weeks passed, I couldn't get the thoughts of that trip out of my mind. I decided that I would see exactly what the March of the Living was all about. I discovered that the journey was organized by the Central Agency for Jewish Education. It was started in 1988. The participants were teenagers between the ages fifteen to eighteen, and these teenagers came from all over the world. The purpose of the trip was to increase the understanding of the Holocaust and to teach about Jewish history before, during, and after the war. The students would walk through all the death camps to learn, to remember, to remind, and to honor; then they would travel to Israel, learning how Israel was re-born after the Holocaust. This intrigued me. Maybe I could help these teenagers understand the dark days in history. But could I stand to face my past? I thought long and hard about the personal consequences I might suffer as opposed to the difference my presence might make. I decided that my pain and emotions were not important; I would bear the burden of my past for the rest of my life anyway. What was important was that the future generations learn from my pain. I reminded myself that I wasn't going back for myself, but for Sabka, for Hinda, for my brothers, and all the children of the past and the children of the future. Then I received a call from Susan Rachlin, a leader from the March of the Living, encour-

aging me to go on this march. She told me that the March of the Living was a march back into history. At the conclusion of the march, the participants would have a better and clearer picture of the Holocaust. I made a commitment to participate in a journey back into my dreadful childhood in order to bring a few pages of history to life for these teens.

First I had to be interviewed by Rochell Baltok. Rochell was the executive director of the March of the Living in South Broward, Florida. During the interview she kept on asking me why I wanted to go on the March of the Living. I replied, "I didn't say I wanted to go on the March of the Living." She repeated that question, and I repeated my answer several times during the course of the interview. Since I had made the commitment to go, even though I really didn't want to go, I felt compelled to participate in the march. 7760

In order to prepare myself for the journey, I attended a series of workshops with teens and the staff. In every meeting, the staff encouraged me and told me how much my going would make a difference. After four months of studying how to talk to teenagers, learning what the trip would entail, and discussing some of the exact locations I would visit, I packed my luggage and headed for the airport.

Carrying one suitcase and a backpack took me back in time when once before I carried the same amount of baggage on a terrible cattle train trip. It saddened me that I was so insecure with the thoughts I was having. Truthfully, I was terrified of what might happen to me. I knew that this would be a journey of pain; I knew I would be reminded of the horrors of the flames, the ashes that darkened the sky, the hunger, the cold, the lice...everything that had been a part of my childhood.

Fortunately, the group from Florida who had befriended me consisted of kind, caring, compassionate individuals who

gave me strong support and courage. Without that group, it would not have been emotionally possible for me to participate on the March of the Living.

When our plane landed in Poland, I gazed out the window as the stewards placed our luggage next to a truck to take us to Treblinka. I was trembling. The truck resembled the trucks from 1944. The memory of the two children who had fallen from the back of the truck flashed through my mind. "I cannot get off of this plane," I thought. "Why did I try to do this?"

"Come on, Irene," one of the teenagers said to me. "I will help you." 7781

I did get off that plane, and for the first time in fifty years, I stepped foot onto hallowed ground ... ground where I had lost my family.... I was there for their memory...in their honor...I had to keep that thought in my mind.

The first place we visited was Treblinka. I could not believe my eyes. The Nazis had destroyed the evidence of the murder of 800,000 Jews. The Polish government had erected 17,000 boulders and rocks of different sizes with the names of countries, cities, and towns engraved on them. It looked like a cemetery. In the center stood an enormous pit in which thousands of bodies had been burned...a mass grave. I searched for the stone representing Czechoslovakia because I had relatives living in Czechoslovakia, and I found that it was one of the tallest of all of the stones. The size of the stones represented the vast murders. I lit candles around the stone, and together with some of the teens, we said a prayer for all of my dead relatives. As we left the camp, it was raining, a cold, dreary rain, just like the rains fifty years before.

That evening, I read a poem. I remembered my mother telling me to read poems when I was sad. I didn't know who had written the poem, but I read:

LISTEN TO THE WIND
TREBLINKA

*Listen to the wind
For there is nothing else we can listen to.*

*This was the place where children never grew up
And old men had no children to console.*

*Listen to the stones, for the stones themselves
Were broken as our hearts were broken.*

*This is the place of eternal night.
Never will there be sun here...
Do not trust your eyes.*

*Never trust anything for there is no one to trust here.
In this place people were abandoned, doomed...
Their solitude and silence were such that even now
We capture them simply by being here.*

*We could build a city here where three quarters of a million people
Lived and vanished overnight.*

*There would be enough doctors, enough teachers, enough parents,
Enough children, enough dreams...to build a nation.*

*And in this space which became the grave of man's
heart
A kingdom vanished.*

*Listen to the wind. Listen to the sky;
For we are here to pray...as in a cemetery.*

*They have no cemetery!
They did not even have a cemetery.
We are their cemeteries!*

The next day, I re-entered Auschwitz. Standing in front of the camp, looking at the entrance, my feet froze to the ground. That sign...it was still the same... "ARBEIT MACHT FREI" (Work Makes You Free). I couldn't take another step, but looking at blue jackets surrounding me, I suddenly felt strong. These were the children of the future. These teenagers were taking me back so that I could go forward.

Soon I entered the courtyard where the prisoners had been executed by firing squads. It is called the shooting wall. I went into the building with a torture chamber below. It had been there that I had stood in the cold water, blinded by darkness, surrounded by four shivering girls. I could not go down to that dungeon. I told some of the teens what had happened there, but I could not bring myself to descend into that gloom.

We entered Block 25, which is today the museum in Auschwitz. There I saw hair, shoes, suitcases, and family belongings that families had brought with them. This was the first time I had seen this place since my belongings had been taken from me. Everything that I saw there told a story about a person. Those items screamed their owners' heartbreak.

The walk from the museum barracks to the gas chamber and the crematory was surreal. In my mind, the teens in the blue jackets were people in rags walking to their deaths. On the way to the crematory, there was a sign pointing the way to the death chambers. As we passed the sign, several teens asked, "Why didn't you resist when you saw this sign? Why did everyone march to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter? We would have fought!"

I realized how much these teenagers did not know so I answered them, "We did resist by staying alive. We did that to defy Hitler. That was our only weapon." They were not much older than I had been. I explained to them that the sign was not there.

"But didn't the Jews know what was happening, especially after it had happened over and over again?"

"We had no choice. By the time we realized where we were, it was too late...it was impossible to resist," I told them quietly. "Many people did try. Unfortunately, most did not succeed. For every defiant person, many others were punished for trying."

One of the teenagers accidentally stepped from the walk onto the grass. "At least you had the grass to cushion your feet when you had to go barefoot."

I looked down at my feet. I could feel the cold rain and the mud between my toes. "There was no grass in Auschwitz in 1944, child. If there had been grass growing under my feet, I would have eaten it." The teenagers looked at me in disbelief.

We walked again. The entrance to the number two gas chamber was down...lower...the entrance was narrow. As we got near the door, I wanted to turn back, but now, as it had been then, it was too packed with people. I could not turn around, and once again the blue jackets turned into the naked

prisoners. When I got to the entrance I grabbed onto the door, and I dug my fingernails into the blue wall that was still blue from the cyclone B gas; I could smell the gas that was still very strong, and the fear of death still embraced me. "God, please save me!"

One of the teens pulled me outside of the chamber. "Shhh....you don't have to go in this time."

I blinked my eyes. *"If you make it," said the boy, "live a little for me, too."*

Wiping the tears from my eyes, I looked for him, but he was gone. The blue-jacketed teen was holding my hand. "You are going to be OK. This time, the Jewish children are going to leave here and help you tell your story."

I smiled through my tears.

The next day, 6,000 people from the forty countries gathered in Auschwitz, alphabetically by country, to begin the March of the Living, commemorating the death marches. We marched six across in each row. I marched at the end of a row of six. In 1944, we had marched in rows of five. I had always been in the middle of the row because of my age and my size. I had to hide so the SS would not gas me.

On this day I wanted to show everyone that I was not afraid anymore. The group with me was concerned about me. They wanted to ease my grief and support me as I tried to face my past. I explained to them that I wanted to walk alone; they understood, but stayed close to me. When I approached the spot where Dr. Mengele decided who lived and who died, I wanted to shout, "I am alive....in spite of your experiments you put me through....I am alive. I am back here with all these Jews, and you cannot touch us anymore. We will never forget the ones you sent into the flames. We will honor them today...always." I was silent, though. I could not shout at him when I looked

at the teens marching quietly. I was ashamed that for a moment I had wanted revenge. When I saw how much evidence had been destroyed so the world could not see what the Nazis had done, I got so angry I wanted to hit someone. Most of all, I wanted to scream at Mengele the way he had screamed at me. I didn't want to frighten the teens that walked with me so I walked alone into an empty gypsy barrack that was still standing and I did shout, "Look at me. I am still alive. I am back with five thousand healthy children and you can't touch us now. We are going to be the voice for the millions of innocent children you sent into the flames." I knew there was no room for hatred in my life and this brief outburst was my retribution.

From that point on, I walked the path of my family, for my family, and for the six million souls who had perished in the number two gas chamber and crematory. Many dignitaries spoke that day, as well as survivors from all over the world. Standing there with the rabbis, the teenagers, and the families of victims, I understood that it had been important for me to face my past. The gas chamber was a pile of rubble, but I went down under the rubble. I could feel the presence of my family. I lit candles, and I could smell the gas embedded in the walls, blue and green from the cyclone B. I scraped up some ashes from where the ovens were and took a few small stones to take to Israel. My parents had always dreamed of going to Palestine; now I could help them get there.

I lit candles and prayed. As I lifted my head I saw a table, set for a Seder, and my family was sitting around it. Next to my little sister was an empty chair. "That is my chair," I thought.

I crept around the gas chamber to sit in my chair, but my mother stood up and raised her hand and held it in front of me, "You cannot sit in your chair today. Promise me that you will not cry anymore and do what you must, Chana." I gasped.

I was Chana.... I reached out to hug my mother, but she was not there...nor was the table.

I sat down on the floor and wrote her a letter.

The letter....*I will not cry anymore, and I will never forget the children who died a cruel death because their eyes were not blue enough or their skin was not light enough or they were Jewish. I will never forget the painful look in their eyes when they marched to their death.*

Dear Mother,

This letter I am writing to you is very special. I want to tell you how much I missed you. I missed you on my wedding day. You didn't share my happiness. Most I missed you when I gave birth to your grandchildren and you couldn't hold them. It is difficult to live with the fact that you were cheated of enjoying them. As for me, being a mother today, I can feel the pain you felt when your children died in your arms from the gas. For me, there is no medicine I can take to heal my pain. I am still learning to live with it. But I promise you to tell the world all that happened and I hope that God will help me stay strong. I pray that he watches over our children of tomorrow so that they can remember the past and never be silent when they see injustice against people. What happened to us should never happen again. On this day, I am making a commitment to help heal the sickness of hatred. When I can't help heal anymore, I hope to sit in my chair and tell them that they are being remembered and learned from.

Love,
Chana

When I came up from that gas chamber, I shared my past with the future generation for the first time in fifty years, and I haven't stopped sharing it since then. Oh, yes, I was liberated on May 7, 1945, but it had taken me a lifetime of living and five thousand teenagers to achieve personal freedom. Hitler lost his battles. I won the war. I was liberated and freed from Birkenau's training ground where the SS had trained me to step over the dead bodies on the road of murder. Hitler set me up to lose hope; I had kept my hope...and my faith.

As I talked to the teenagers, I told them that I wished I could talk to my captors. I wished I could tell them, "I survived your atrocities and I care for others. I smile and I walk among people that value humanity. It may have taken me fifty years to speak of your tortures that almost destroyed humanity, but I will be silent no more." 8057

The next day was Remembrance Day, and our group came back to Birkenau where I had spent eight months of my camp life. I walked from place to place remembering, trying to conclude my visit, trying to remember, and trying to learn. Again that evening, I wrote:

CRY NOT

*I promise not to cry anymore for you...
I'll just always remember you.
I heard you when you cried for help...
When you walked down that deadly ramp.
"Shima Israel" were your last words.
You went to heaven, I was told.
The emptiness I feel since then,
I tried to stop crying, but I cry again.
I am doing everything that you asked*

*And telling the truth about their barbaric task
 To tell you all that happened then.
 I am alive and telling your story
 And God will help me with all that I have to do.
 I will always remember you...
 But I will not cry again for you.*

The trip reached its conclusion in Israel. I saw the proud expression on the faces of the teenagers as they departed the plane. How wonderful it was to be a part of a group of children who were proud of their heritage. I had guilt in my heart, knowing that I was lucky to have been spared from the flames when so many were taken. I realized that God had a plan for my life. I was spared in order to leave my legacy so that the future generations would bear witness for me. These teenagers made a commitment to keep Israel our home forever and chose to serve as the witness to the witness.

THE LAST DAYS

Obediah: 15 "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head."

While I was on the March of the Living, I met Jennifer Resnick, and she told me that she was an interviewer for the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. I had never heard of the foundation, and I asked her what it was. She told me that Steven Spielberg and the foundation had asked trained interviewers to interview Holocaust survivors, liberators, and eyewitnesses and obtain as many testimonies as possible. Spielberg had already completed the film *Schindler's List* when this project began. Jennifer asked me if she could interview me. I agreed to the interview. By 1995, Jennifer had my testimony sent to the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

In 1997, I received a phone call from Bonnie Semiton. She informed me that she was working for Mr. Steven Spielberg and the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. She told me that she was familiar with my testimony, and she asked me if I would agree to be in a film and review my testimony. Bonnie said that in my first testimony I had talked about diamonds, but I hadn't given details about what happened to the diamonds. I told her no one had ever asked me what happened to the diamonds. I didn't believe her at first.

I thought someone was playing a practical joke. I listened to her, though.

Finally, I agreed to review my testimony, but I explained to her that I only talked about my past for educational purposes. She said, "That's exactly what we are going to do with your testimony." 4060

The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation called me again and set up a date to come to film me. They asked me if there was any place I wanted to go that I had not been able to go before. Since I had just come back from the concentration camps and the March of the Living, I knew I didn't want to go back there. I had never been back to my hometown, and I asked them if I could take my children and go back to the town where I was born and spent the early years of my childhood. They agreed to take me "home."

Mark couldn't go with me, so my daughter Robin and I made the trip. We flew out of Miami and went to Frankfurt, Germany, and then on to Budapest, Hungary. The crew met us in Hungary. From Budapest, we traveled by van to Poleno, which is now in the Ukraine. Before we got to Poleno, the Survivors of the Shoah History Foundation had sent a female crewmember who spoke Russian to find what was left of my past. When Robin and I arrived in Poleno, I was sad at first. I knew I was not going to find who I wanted to find. I was happy, though, to be able to go to the front yard of my house, to visit my school, and to go back to see the site of my destroyed temple. I felt a sense of belonging, and I was happy to show my daughter some of my heritage, although I knew that in reality it wasn't mine because my heritage had been taken away from me.

I met two of my schoolmates, Marya and Olena, and that saddened me more than anything. I was hoping to find a bit

of happiness from my past, but the first thing they wanted to know was if I had come back to take something away from them that had belonged to me. I explained that I had returned to show my child where I was from and to let her see where her grandparents and the family she had never known had lived. I felt it was important for her to understand her roots. The only happiness I found by being back in my hometown was that I found my mother's helper.

We spent almost a week filming in Poleno and Ungvar. I realized that Poleno was no longer my home, but I was happy that the United States of America was my true home. I was ready to leave Poleno to go "home." My part of the filming was finished.

After *The Last Days* was completed, Robin and I traveled to California to the first premier. Visiting the Survivors of the Shoah History Foundation for the first time, I walked through the building where history was being preserved. My heart was filled with joy, and I felt a strong tomorrow for future generations and the world. Because of the caring of Mr. Steven Spielberg, the world will never forget what happened in the dark days in history and will remember the many innocent humans who perished during the fires of the Holocaust.

After the premier, *The Last Days* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. In 1998, the film won the Academy Award. The Oscar was given to Mr. Steven Spielberg. My dream had become a reality. How I wished I could speak to my silent friend, Sabka. I wanted to tell her that I had become the voice I had promised. The world was not going to forget.

The Last Days brought awareness of the real events that took place in history. Although I had been a number during the Holocaust, and that number had replaced my name and

my dignity, I had never lost my faith and my hope. By participating in *The Last Days*, I found courage and strength to share my story with others.

The most gratifying aspect of the film has been the comments that students have made about my role in the film and about the impact the movie made on their lives. A thirteen year old wrote: *I gained an abundance of knowledge from the movie The Last Days. I had no idea the events of the Holocaust were that extreme. Overall, I learned that if we forget, it will happen again.*

A college student wrote: *If I could sum up what the film taught me, I could express it in two words. Those two words would be hate and love. Hatred caused the slaughter of millions of people; hatred caused one man to corrupt billions of people into believing what he believed. Love made it possible for survivors to keep on living; love makes it possible for survivors to share their experiences with us first hand; love made The Last Days possible. My commitment is to teach that kind of love.*

Sabka is no longer my "silent" friend. I have shared her story with millions of people. Her voice has been heard.

FUTURE GENERATIONS

Deuteronomy 4:6 "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

These are the words inscribed on the wall of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. The words were written by Moses almost 3,500 years ago. It is my hope that people of all walks of life will heed these words.

Since I first went on the March of the Living, I have returned many times to the home of my childhood, the death camps. I have shared my story with many people, many countries, and many governments. Sometimes it is still hard for me to believe that I am alive and that I have shared my past with the most powerful government in the world...the United States of America. Sharing my story with children has been most important to me because those children will be the government of the future. It will be their responsibility to make sure that everyone is free to practice their beliefs. We must all remember the Holocaust to make sure it doesn't happen again. The Holocaust is not just a part of history, but an event that lingers in the present.

In today's world, the focus has been upon the events of September 11, 2001. This was an end of an era when America felt safe. In reality, America was in danger of forgetting how

powerful a force hatred could be, perhaps pushing the events of the Holocaust aside to take place on one or two pages of a history book. The new America has tasted the bitterness of violence and mass death. The United States has taken a painful refresher course in what they could have easily forgotten.

America is a brilliant country. Freedom comes at a high price. No longer naïve, the citizens of this great nation now recognize that hate and prejudice fuel destruction. The lessons of the Holocaust must be taught to the children, for it is the children who hold tomorrow. If this country will stand together against prejudice, racism, and promote tolerance, together we can make a difference and change lives and behaviors.

Today I am seventy-five years old, and I am one of the youngest Holocaust survivors. The next generation will not be able to meet a survivor...to hear the story first-hand. This generation of children today has an important mission. They must learn from the past in order to teach the future. The task today's children are facing is really quite similar to the assignment Moses gave his children many years ago.

My hope is that the youth of today embrace a good understanding of this painful event. When I am no longer here, I hope that they will carry my message to generations to come so those fires of hell become a light of hope. There are those who say the Holocaust never happened. I am one of the workers against those who tirelessly deny the Holocaust. Those who deny will not succeed because we remember.

My hopes are to instill a trust in youth which will compel them to speak out against crimes against humanity whenever they see it. I came forward to share my own degrading experience in hopes that my personal story could influence future generations to work to understand and prevent intolerance

and indifference. I don't want the world to forget what happened to us because I don't want it to happen again.

For too long, hatred, fear, and intolerance have torn families, communities, and nations around the world apart. If this world is to achieve lasting peace, all people must learn that even if we come from different backgrounds, races, and cultures, we share common values and dreams for our future generations. With care and support, each individual can grow up to become a healthy, happy, responsible adult who will make valuable contributions to society. Remembering the Holocaust teaches us what is important in life. If the future generations remember the Holocaust, it will be a lasting memorial to the victims.

I cannot explain the darkness from our history when I was a child, but I must always remember it so I will not be silent. I refuse to forget the victims of the Holocaust or to let them fade into pictures or names in a museum. As long as I am able I will speak worldwide to improve human conditions and to bring awareness that genocide is possible, even in a civilized modern world. My goal is to make a difference in one person every time I share my painful past.

We must pause to remember a tragic era in our history when light was obscured by darkness and when the forces of evil were arrayed against our people. Six million Jews, countless others, and one and a half million children were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz, Birkenau, Dachau, Buchenwald, Treblinka, Teresenstadt, Bergen-Belsen, and others. These names evoke horror and pain, and yet we recall these names and the barbarous acts associated with them. We must inspire generations yet unborn to learn well the lessons of that evil time. The memory of the slain must forever be etched in the

conscience of mankind. We cannot answer their cries, but we must never be silent in the face of injustice.

Today, in spite of the chemicals in my soup and the experiments, I have a handsome son, a beautiful daughter, and five grandchildren that light up my life every day. To me, they are a miraculous gift, and I am grateful. My mother's diamonds survived the atrocities with me, and they are to go to the first-born girl in each generation of my family forever. The diamonds are never to be sold unless, God forbid, they are needed to buy bread.

Dearest Mother
 Dearest Mother, lost to me
Your soul breathes in my heart.
Your words I will never forget.
You shine so brightly
Like your diamonds-
Forever a part of me.
Continue please to kindle the spirit
Which helps me find the words
To tell of the flames.
Inspire me, Mother,
To gain strength and tell the story
That awakens and enlightens the children.
My beautiful mother of diamonds,
You live in the hearts of all that listen-
Not only your children and grandchildren-
In all children.
My beautiful Mother,
I came to your resting place
And brought Jewish children
Wearing jackets with Jewish stars of pride

Not jackets with stripes of shame and fear.
My beautiful Mother,
I am keeping my promise to you.
I am telling the world of our torturers and
We remember and always will.
Your diamonds are with me.

I love you.

Chana

The following letter was written by the author following her husband's death.

To you, Herman, the love of my life,
 We have gone through happy and sad days together, but most were happy days because I always had your love. When I thought I couldn't go on, you were always there to comfort me.

I want to tell you what your love has done.

It has given me courage and strength. Your love caused my sadness to diminish, and it was a great gift. I love you because you made the impossible possible. You understood me completely.

There is no person on this earth who can measure up to you..

I was so very lucky to have you in my life, even if it was for such a short time.

I always prayed to grow old with you and to be happy with you until our last days.

I will always love you.

Your short stop, Irene

The following letters were written by the author to her two children.

Dear Mark Lawrence, my only son,

One day, when you read this, you will understand better why I am so protective of you and always soften your fall. When you were born, your father and I knew that God loved us and had blessed us with a wonderful son like you.

You were the greatest treasure we could have asked for. For me, you were especially a miracle because of my past experiences. You made my life happy.

Now that you are grown, I am very proud of you and your achievements. You are a father now to two precious little boys like you were. I still want to protect you and soften your falls.

I wish you happiness, health, and the best in life. I love you.

Mom

Dear Robin, my only daughter,

When you were born on a beautiful June morning, you were a seven pound bundle of joy. I looked at you and saw a beautiful little girl with bright, blue eyes and great tomorrows. What joy I felt! Finally I was building my family.

Happiness was something that I never thought was possible for me, but even when you and your brother were fighting over a toy, I was watching with happiness.

I know that growing up as my daughter was not easy for you, but I only wanted you to be the best, and not denied a childhood like I was. I wanted to keep you a child for a littler longer, and now I know I asked the impossible. I am sorry. You filled my life with such joy.

Now that you are a mother yourself to three beautiful daughters, I know that you can understand me better. I love you.

Mom

ADDENDUM

September 1, 1939 – Poland was invaded and WWII began.

November, 1939 – Hungarian authorities ordered Jewish businesses to close. The authorities confiscated all merchandise from Jewish businesses.

October 1943 – 1944 – The Military Police and the Arrow Cross – Nyilosh staged raids on Jewish homes. Jewish men were forced into labor units and sent away. They were never seen again.

March 19, 1944 – German troops, the SS, and the Gestapo occupy Hungary.

March 22, 1944 – Jewish residents are ordered to deliver all jewelry, radios, and vehicles.

March 24, 1944 – All Jews are ordered to wear the yellow star and are forbidden to mix with the Gentile neighbors.

March 29, 1944 – All books, holy scrolls, and documents are burned.

April 1, 1944 – A curfew was enforced until relocation to the ghetto.

Over 432,000 Hungarian Jews are deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Most were murdered by gas in the gas chambers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Irene Weisberg Zisblatt resides in Pembroke Pines, Florida. She is 76 years old and still travels to schools all over the country, speaking to children and adults. Currently she is involved in the production of a new documentary, participates with the annual March of the Living, assists with the Holland and Knight Holocaust Remembrance Project, and serves on the Advisory Board for Broward County Florida Family Services. Irene spends her free time enjoying her family. Her greatest pleasure is being Nana to her five miracle grandchildren: Haley, Skyler, Shelby, Jacob, and Andie.



*My mother's diamonds and I
survived the atrocities.*

*They are to be given to the first born girl
in each generation. They are not to be sold,
except God forbid, to buy bread.*

"Irene Zisblatt eloquently speaks and inspires today's generation with her personal story of remembrance and survival."

– Steven Spielberg

This is the story of Irene Zisblatt, Auschwitz and after. Her autobiography moves from Irene's childhood in Hungary through her terrifying coming-of-age as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps and her life in America. It is a story of compassion and hope between two young girls whose bizarre fate brought them together, whose love for each other inspired their survival, and whose friendship tragically ended with liberation in the forests of Germany.

The lack of bitterness with which Irene tells her experience, along with her straight-forward style, adds power to what is essentially a testament to the triumph of the human spirit. Faced with the dehumanizing ordeal of life in Auschwitz-Birkenau, she found that by believing strongly that her horrors were temporary, she could cling to the hope that she could survive and be human again.

It has taken Mrs. Zisblatt fifty years to recount the terror of her experience. We should be grateful for her courage to relive these events in order to write this book. Irene is grateful to this country for giving her the opportunity to begin life anew. She is not embittered or filled with hatred and it is her goal to educate children in order to rid the world of prejudice, intolerance, and indifference.

\$20 US

ISBN 978-097871133-7



9 780978 711337

www.IreneZisblatt.com
www.TheFifthDiamond.com